JUNGLE JOURNEY

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In a bamboo forest of the Central Provinces

by

ETHEL MANNIN

> 'So far back as I can remember, ever this yearning to be somewhere else, implacable, tenacious as a hurt; forever wide-open atlases.'
>
> PAUL MORAND in *Earth Girdled*

Illustrated with 41 *Photographs*
by JEAN PORTEOUS

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To

M. D. CHATURVEDI

Chief Conservator of Forests of the United Provinces of India, without whom the major part of this book—the jungles of the United Provinces—would not have been possible—

with gratitude and affection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My daughter and I wish to record our deep appreciation of the generously given hospitality and assistance we received throughout India and West Pakistan, very often at the hands of complete strangers. Both Hindus and Moslems received us into their homes with a courtesy and graciousness characteristic of the East.

For assistance with proofs I am indebted, as always, to Gilbert Turner, F.L.A., and to Reginald Reynolds for proof-reading and valuable counsel and criticism.

E. M.

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Part I

JOURNEY INTO THE SUN

I

SHIPBOARD

ALTHOUGH I had for years served on committees and spoken on public platforms—including the plinth in Trafalgar Square—in the cause of Indian independence; and despite my profound veneration for Mahatma Gandhi, and my delight in the beautiful artistry of the Indian dancers, Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal and their companies, not until the spring of 1948, by which time India was free—and divided—and Gandhiji dead, did I feel any urge to visit the country. The lure of Oriental exoticism—joss-sticks, and the ornamental brass-work erroneously described as 'Benares', and dark carpets and rich silks, and the convolutions of Hindu mythology—were not for me, I felt. It is true that in Turkestan in 1935 my spirit had wandered across the Pamirs to Afghanistan and Kashmir, a little wistfully; never again, I thought, would I be so near. But life is unpredictable—which is a major part of its interest.

The illegal, and consequently far-from-golden, journey to Samarkand had been in response to the challenge of the forbidden—'for lust of knowing what should not be known'. I was glad to have seen the turquoise and lapis-lazuli mosques and tomb of Tamerlaine, and to have added my name to the small list of travellers who have reached Samarkand; there was the sense of achievement; but I flew back from Moscow muttering 'quoth the raven' . . . with which the offended Soviet authorities concurred.

Later my imagination was mildly stirred by an invitation from a young man I had never met urging me to get into an aeroplane as quickly as possible and join him in Baghdad, an adventure he considered would be entertaining for us both. I believe that Isfahan, reputedly more beautiful than Samarkand, and in better state of repair—the Soviet authorities caring little or nothing for ancient monuments, being given over to the idea of a brave new world, stream-lined and efficient—was one of the items on the agenda. But, whilst I found the idea vaguely amusing, pleasantly original and unconventional, no real spark was struck. Not one sufficiently lively to quicken the toyed-with idea into the action of booking a passage. The East, Near or Far, I was convinced, was not for me ever again.

When my imagination did finally turn Eastward again, at long last, in the spring of 1948, it was not in response to the call of temple bells, or *muezzin* calling from minaret, but because there was mention of something completely new and strange, something the Indians call *jangal*, something incalculable, baffling imagination—therefore something to which the mind returned again and again, curiosity-quickened.

And it came about in a curious way. At the end of 1948 there was to have been a world pacifist conference at Santineketan—always associated with the memory of Rabindrinath Tagore—at which Mahatma Gandhi was to have presided. But on January 31, 1948, the light of the greatest moral force of our time was quenched at the hand of an assassin. It was decided that nevertheless the plans for the conference should go forward. It was natural that my husband, Reginald Reynolds, who worked with Gandhiji in India during the Civil Disobedience Campaign of 1930, and who was entrusted to carry the ultimatum to the British Raj, should be invited to the conference. It seemed an inspired idea that my daughter and I should join him early in January 1949, at the close of the conference, and that we three should visit an old friend, Mr. Chaturvedi, then Chief Conservator of Forests of the United Provinces, in his jungles.

"It would mean a book for you, Jean could take the photographs, and we'd be doing a long-overdue Adventurous Thing together!"

Here imagination stirred so vividly that correspondence with a shipping agent was begun immediately. Then the Divinity that shapes our ends took a hand in the matter; the conference was postponed for twelve months, because of the difficulties of securing passages for the delegates. In the meantime, however, a 'degree of priority' had been secured for the author and her daughter, publishers' interest in the proposed book aroused, leave of absence from her job secured for the proposed photographer, and Mr. Chaturvedi had written that he had altered his plans so as to be as accessible as possible 'in this country of vast distances'. He added that with the proper photographic equipment—which he specified—and with luck, Jean should get a photograph of a tiger. . . .

It was that tiger which weighed the scales down on the side of adhering to our plans. We did not picture him burning bright in any forests of the night—which is all nonsense anyhow, a tiger having a great more to do at night than hang about in forests, and his dark stripes serving as protective coloration in darkness—but by daylight, and quizzically gazing, brown grass and golden beast highly stylised, like the Henri Rousseau painting.

Which, as it turned out, was exactly how we did see him, the evening we followed him on elephant back, along a track through the jungle.

For weeks beforehand people kept saying to us that they supposed we were very busy doing something they called 'getting ready for India', and the oftener they said it the vaguer we became. What, exactly, we wondered, were we supposed to be doing—charging about buying tropical kit? But the idea of ourselves wearing topees struck us as merely comic. For the rest—does it take so long to pack a rucksack?

"But you can't go all over India with a *rucksack*!"

Incredulity blended with horror in the enunciation of the last word.

I pointed out that I had gone all over Russia with one, and Jean merely remarked that she couldn't go anywhere without her rucksack —"I'd feel kind of unfaithful!"

Knowledgeable people who 'knew India' also assured us that we couldn't go all over India without 'bearers'. They wanted to know what we were doing about bearers. It had not occurred to us we would be doing anything about them. We were not very clear what they were. Presumably people who bore your burdens. But what would they bear —our rucksacks?

There would be in addition, of course, a typewriter and camera, but nothing ever separates me from my typewriter or Jean from her camera. Even Ella Maillart, to whom I presented the idea of our having bearers as something droll, said thoughtfully that it might be as well to have *a* bearer—"Someone to go and get your tickets for you, and things like that," she said. Which, coming from the author of *Turkestan Solo*, seemed odd. A colonel friend said of *course* we must have bearers, and offered to put us in touch with one he had had in India in the old days, 'a very good chap. The poor chap's probably out of work now. . . .'

No one took us seriously about our rucksacks, and the shipping agent sent us each a large packet of labels assorted, as is suited to voyaging properly with cabin trunks, valises, suit-cases 'wanted on the voyage', and all the paraphernalia which the majority of human beings feel impelled to drag about the world with them.

In the last few days it occurred to us that there were a few small items we must look to—outstandingly, typewriter ribbons, and films in metal containers suited to tropical use. We made a note of these two necessities and began to feel that we were at last 'getting ready for India'. One day in an upsurge of preparatory activity, I rushed out and bought several packets of toilet paper, which we had been warned to take, a couple of typewriter ribbons, and a few medical things. Jean began amassing films. But beyond this we had no idea what we were supposed to do to 'get ready' for India. There is altogether too much fuss about transporting oneself from one place to another.

'Tourist-class' was another cause for exclamation from the knowledgeable. "The first-class passengers will bring you their babies to mind," we were assured, "or offer you a few bob to do a bit of washing for them." That would be all right, we thought, we were fond of children, and it might be a way of turning an honest penny during the long days at sea.

But the knowledgeable were wrong—as they so often are. Tourist-class no less than first is equipped with efficient laundry arrangements, also a nursery in charge of a trained nurse, where children can be left during their parents' mealtimes. So that though there were a number of children in the tourist class—English, Indian, Chinese—no one offered us a bob to mind the baby. (It would have been a special joy to have been allowed to mind one of the lovely little doll-like Chinese babies.) The first-class nursery overlooked our sports' deck—it had a merry-go-round and a bigger verandah, but first-class and tourist-class children make the same noises of pleasure and disapproval and distress with or without merry-go-rounds. . . .

I am of those who like the sea to look at, but do not like to be either in it or on it. For me, as for Dr. Johnson, a ship is merely a floating prison, and there were moments of depression and boredom when I thought that if I could have reached Bombay by serving sixteen days in Holloway I would have preferred to do so, for in prison I should at least have had something to do, and have precious hours of solitude in my cell. Dr. Johnson declared, 'No man would be a sailor who had contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned. . . . A man in jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company!'[1]

Food aboard ship has evidently improved since Dr. Johnson's times and the meals in this ship were excellent, and far too large. The shipboard day begins at six-thirty with strong tea and oranges. Breakfast a couple of hours later consists of cereals and stewed fruit, followed by fish, egg and bacon and tomatoes, or sausages, toast and marmalade, tea or coffee. The majority of passengers appeared to work their way through the entire menu, even when we had sailed into the hot weather. In order that the strength of the passengers may be sustained till luncheon, beef-tea is served on deck at eleven o'clock—in the hot weather, ice-cream replaces the beef-tea. In the afternoon, tea, with bread-and-butter and jam and cakes, gives the stomach something to occupy itself with until dinner—with soup, fish, meat, sweet, fruit. At luncheon many of the passengers follow the soup with both hot and cold meat courses before going on to the cheese. For those who can stomach it, therefore, it is meat three times a day—for human beings with no more strenuous exercise ahead of them than a few rounds of deck-quoits or deck-tennis. It is a vegetarian's nightmare. A Dane who ate everything on all the menus every day nevertheless complained that he was always hungry, because he missed the glasses of milk which accompanied his meals in his own country; he also missed the quantities of butter. He had the red face and heavy build of all who over-eat. Who was it who said that we are what we eat? On a hot day nearing the Mouths of the Nile this young Dane consumed a luncheon of hot soup, fish, curried meat and rice, cold meat and salad, ice-cream and wafer, biscuits and cheese, roll and butter.

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[1] On my return to England I was looking again at Mr. Julian Huxley's *Africa View* (Chatto & Windus, 1936) and was interested to read this distinguished traveller's reactions to shipboard life, recorded in the Indian Ocean: 'After days confined to the same ship, the same few people, the same eternal sea, especially if stormless like ours, the same games, the same food, a horrible sluggishness and apathy descends on one's life. Books are not so interesting, and one cannot read so long at a stretch; all one's plans for working off arrears of writing dribble away to nothing or next to nothing; conversation palls.'

People, commonly, have very odd ideas concerning food-values and the needs of the human body. An Indian on board—a well-built middle-aged Brahmin—volunteered the information that his weight was thirteen and a half stone, and he did not want to take much exercise, he said, or deny himself at table, as he was anxious to keep his weight up, against the time when he would be back at work and very often having only sandwiches at mid-day. He seemed to consider it necessary to take in reserves of food, like a camel. He was frequently to be observed after his heavy luncheons asleep in a lounge. The combination of heavy meals and boredom induces a great many passengers to sleep between luncheon and tea.

It was interesting and disappointing to find that the Indians were not exempt from the general shipboard habit of over-eating. One Indian, tucking into the cold meat with which he followed his grilled cutlets at luncheon, remarked regretfully, that in England there was meat 'only one day a week'. How, I wondered, did he imagine vegetarians exist? Another Indian at tea-times continually deplored the badness of the cakes in England, and found satisfaction in the reflection that there were good pastries—with synthetic cream—to be had in Calcutta.

In that liner to Bombay it would be a relief, I often thought, to meet an ascetic Indian, a 'Gandhi man'. Instead of which there were Hindus eating not merely meat but beef, though they said that when they got home it 'would be different'. A Brahmin who had been able to get himself rice at most mealtimes when it was not on the menu shocked a party of missionary ladies at luncheon one day by declaring that his God was rice. "If God is everywhere then He is in rice," he declared, "Therefore rice is God, and God is rice. When I eat rice I receive my God." We felt we knew what he meant, but the expression on the faces of the ladies clearly indicated that they believed the poor heathen black man worshipped rice as a God. When the poor heathen black man was not eating rice in this exultant and worshipful fashion he was reading Tagore.

There were a number of missionaries on board, mostly bound for China. Why, I could not help wondering, is orthodox goodness so invariably drab? By their faces shall ye know them. There is a kind of missionary face, and there are certainly missionary clothes. Ah, those long pointed missionary shoes, those beige lisle stockings wrinkled at the ankle, twisted at the seam, those dowdy skirts and jumpers. Is it not possible to be a good Christian and be attractive—not necessarily the same thing as being good-looking—and dress pleasingly? Later I discovered that it is possible, but the attractive young American Baptist missionary we met in Assam was not purely evangelical; she was a doctor and running a hospital. Many missionaries, I am aware, perform a useful service in India and China and elsewhere, running much-needed medical missions, welfare centres, schools, and they bring a selfless devotion to the work; it is just a pity that with so much good solid virtue they cannot contrive to combine a little gaiety and charm.

One of the shipboard missionaries was an evangelical Finn who made hideous the sunny mornings on deck squeezing out hymns on an accordion; a number of ladies would gather round and sing to this accompaniment. The Indians and Chinese would look on in a mild interested wonderment. The less evangelical minded of the English element would remove their deck-chairs to the other end of the deck; better the parrot-house of the children's playroom than this evocation of wet Sunday afternoons in grey streets.

The first Sunday at sea was a bright sunny day off Cape Finisterre.

'Cape Finisterre is drawing near,
Cape Finisterre is past.'

The doggerel lines left over from childhood rose to the surface of my mind; very odd the sediment at the bottom of the mind, and its occasional disturbance.

Seasoned travellers say that Cape Finisterre is the point at which you either come up on deck or go below, according to which way you are travelling. When some of us who had been below all the previous day, when we rolled across the Bay, sunned ourselves on deck that Sunday a Chinese remarked, beaming round at us all, "We are all good sailors this morning!"

A non-conformist minister held a service and gave a sermon, the burden of which was that if you wanted to get to Bombay you were careful to get into the right ship at Southampton; thus it was, he declared, with the Kingdom of God. A Hindu who had attended the service, out of curiosity, was perplexed. For, said he, there is more than one shipping company, very many ships going the same route, bound for the same port, and several ports of embarkation.

There were some white-robed French nuns, whose young and charming faces were in striking contrast with the standard missionary face. They knew how to be serious without being solemn. They kept to themselves, reading their breviaries on deck, counting their white rosary beads, never idle. There were also some black-robed Swiss nuns, also good-looking and young, with ready smiles. They were always referred to as 'the black nuns' as opposed to 'the white'; but 'black' or 'white' all were quiet and unobtrusive—and decorative. And they had the immense virtue of not singing hymns or trying to convert anyone. By their quiet devotion they might convert by example—but that is another matter.

The Indian who had been puzzled by the non-conformist minister's sermon liked the nuns and never missed an opportunity of sitting with them at tea-times. He found them 'sympathetic', he said. And he was much interested in the subject of religion. His line was that the need was for the religious spirit everywhere, and that it was that, and not the brand of religion, which was important. We are all after the same thing, he declared—God. "You Christians seek him through Christ, we Hindus through our gods, who are only manifestations of the One, the Moslems seek him through their prophet Mahomet."

"And the Buddhists—the religion without God?"

"Morality without God," he amended. "That is something different. Buddhism is a philosophy rather than a religion."

"God is anyhow a matter of definition," I murmured, and looked up at Orion and his starry belt. I would rather have been leaning against the ship's rail looking for phosphorus in the ship's wake. There had been too many after-dinner pacings of the sports' deck discussing religion. In shipboard life there is altogether too much conversation.

I agreed with him concerning the need for a religion as opposed to a materialist spirit, but I wanted religion liberated from orthodoxy, from churches and temples and chapels and mosques. As I seemed to be committed to the conversation I made an effort and began telling him about the Quakers, who have no ministers or priests, no churches or chapels, and who do not sing hymns or recite prayers. Oddly—for one so interested in religions—he had never heard of them. I went on to explain the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light as the essential spirit of religion, revelation springing from within. But I felt I was making no headway; his Hindu soul could clearly not comprehend a religion devoid of any ritual of any kind and I felt a certain sympathy; it is certainly easier to understand a Christian Indian embracing the Catholic church rather than joining the Society of Friends. In the Church of Rome he will find again the incense and rosaries of Hinduism, and all the richness of altar ritual.

"I do not need," he declared, "to embrace Christianity in any of its forms in order to appreciate Christ, any more than I need to embrace Islam in order to appreciate Mahomet, or Buddhism in order to appreciate Gautama. I believe that Mahatma Gandhi was right in taking the best from all religions. We need a universal religion."

"If we had Gandhism we'd have a living Christianity," I suggested. "Gandhiji was for all practical purposes perhaps the greatest Christian of our time, though he always called himself a Hindu. He practised that universal love and self-abnegation which is the essence of Christian teaching. In the utter simplicity and humility of his mode of life he followed directly in the imitation of Christ."

But who knows, I thought, how many obscure people there are, of all nationalities, all over the world, living selfless lives in the unwitting imitation of Christ—loving their neighbours, casting their bread on the waters, without either love or fear of any recognised Deity? Have the professing Christians the monopoly of virtue? The orthodox of all religions assume that they have. Yet in the terms of the Sermon on the Mount there are Christians who do not acknowledge Christ and there are among us saints who are not eligible—within the canons of the Church—for canonisation. 'Saints without the St.' as Father Martindale has called these unorthodox holy people. And there is saintliness outside of the Christian religion—Gandhiji was a Hindu. In all orthodoxy so much importance is attached to the outward expressions—the trappings—of religion.

Only the Quakers, in their simplicity, their complete absence of ritual, approach to the Christian heart-of-the-matter. Yet they too can be said to have a too, too solid worthiness. So much integrity and yet —*je ne sais quoi*. . . . It could be that for the free spirit and the inquiring mind the unorganised, individual approach to God, favoured by that near-mystic Aldous Huxley—who has said that if he were going to join any religious organisation he would be most likely to join the Society of Friends—is the only possible one.

Two days out from England, and by mid-day the sun is really warm. In the evening we pass the Burling Islands, two groups of grey stone rock four miles apart rising dramatically from the sea, with a lighthouse on each group. There is a wonderful sunset—long bands of crimson darkening to purple, the flamboyant finale of a brilliant day. All day the sea has been dark blue, almost black in its intensity—the authentic wine-dark sea. At night it is a flat pool of silver in the moonlight.

In the morning we are off the coast of Spain, and by mid-day Africa. We pass close enough to the Rock of Gibraltar to produce a great clicking of cameras on deck. The sun is pleasantly hot and the sea pleasantly flat, but by afternoon the wind is freshening.

It continued to freshen, and by noon of the following day clouds came up and there was a swell which made some of us decide that tea was really an unnecessary sort of meal and far better to lie in one's bunk and read. . . .

Next day the Island of Pantelleria, off Sicily, and a memory of the war—the bombing planes so thick over the island that they had to queue up. From the sea the island appears to consist of a high mountain behind and a lower one in the foreground. No houses are visible; they are probably in the valley between the two mountains. There is a crown of thick white cloud right across the island. It is the last land till the Mouths of the Nile three days later. There is altogether too much sea. . . .

The day-long drizzle clears up in the evening and after dinner we walk on deck and look at the very thick bright stars and at the phosphorus on the sea. In the white foam of the ship's wake the phosphorus sparkles like diamonds caught in a froth of net. It is fascinating to watch. Sirius is high in the sky and very bright. It is easy to make out Orion's jewelled belt and sword.

'What do you hunt, Orion,
This starry night?'

Dead worlds and living; millions of light-years, and the knowledge of this world as a cooling planet, soon, in terms of eternity, to be dead as the moon. Before this vast incomprehensibility a human life becomes the merest problem in ciphers; it doesn't add up, because there is nothing to add. One's personal sorrows which so ravage one's speck of life are less than the dust in comparison; yet how escape them? We cannot comprehend eternity and must live our twenty-four-hour days as best we may, coming to terms with life as best we may, and, what is even more difficult, coming to terms with death, which so relentlessly takes away. . . .

That night I dream that the stars are being displaced and I realise that it is the beginning of the atomic war.

There is a freshening wind and the sea a little choppy, and it is cooler than might be expected approaching the Mouths of the Nile. The evangelical Finn wheezes away on his accordion every morning on deck, supported lustily by the hymn-singing ladies.

'Pharaoh had a daughter
With a very wicked smile;
She said she *found* a baby
In the rushes of the Nile.'

But that is not what the missionaries sing. Gaiety is no part of the evangelical make-up; only a depressing jollity.

There is no peace aboard ship, no stillness, no escape from the continual sound and movement. Only the Chinese seem to sit quietly, apart, absorbed in themselves, impervious to all externals. They smile and are polite, but somehow aloof despite their friendliness, like the nuns. They sit quietly, smiling, dandling their doll-like babies with their dark almond-eyes and fringes of straight black hair. The women have singularly sweet faces, and they wear long narrow straight silk skirts slit a few inches up at each side. There is a great activity of games, and the daily excitement of the ship's tote.

The children—white and brown alike—live a busy, noisy concentrated life of their own. There are a great many under-fives and they are pretty to watch. Sometimes the older ones form small groups on the deck, or squatting on the hatch, and a young woman in a blue uniform dress with a gold anchor on the breast pocket sits on the deck with them and tells them stories. The noises of the children are preferable to the adult noises—to the evangelical caterwauling, for example, and the hearty, monotonous cries of the quoits players—"White lies!" "Oh, very nice!" "No idea!" "Very pretty!" "You've had it!" with the disproportionate laughter and the facetiousness.

In the heat of the day some of the women roll up their slacks to the knees to sunburn their legs; some of the men, still in lounge suits despite the warmth, do the same. It is an unlovely sight. One of the female passengers taking such trouble to get herself brown refuses to say good morning to the people who are naturally that colour. Odd.

The Hindu who reads Tagore's poems says he derives great courage from them, that they contain 'all the wisdom of the Upanishads'. He will spend as many hours as I like translating them into English for me. I accept a few 'sample' translations, but they do not speak to my condition. Aboard ship it would be hard to know what does. I cannot agree with R. L. Stevenson that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. I want, as I used to say as a child on tedious train-journeys, I want to *be* there. . . .

An Englishwoman explains to another that India is 'very different now', that there are very few English people in Delhi, and the hotels and boarding-houses and even the cinemas are run by the Indians. It is quite difficult to get servants, too, and 'these people' make 'quite good servants'.

But when we get to India we discover that the Indians have turned the tables. They say that the British made bad masters but that they make good servants, and that that is why so many have been retained in the Civil Service and in Administrative posts.

Sometimes some of the first-class passengers lean on the rail of the boat-deck, above the tourist sports' deck, and watch the 'third class' at play. They appear to find the past-time entertaining—and so 'pictuesque', apparently, that they even take photographs occasionally. At night as we promenade our deck for purposes of star and phosphorus gazing, and for the exercise which justifies a night-cap, we get glimpses of the 'class' in dinner-jackets and evening dresses. We are not much interested. The men look like penguins, and we can raise bare-back dresses and fur capes ourselves on gala nights, the way you'd never know but what you were in the first, my dear. . . .

And, inverted snobbery, at our end of the ship we have all paid our own fares, which is more, we say, than can be said of the first-class, many of whom are having their passages paid by firms sending them out, and some of whom are services people paid for by the War Office and the Admiralty. So why should they give themselves airs?

But all ships should be one-class. Are we not all literally in the same boat?

If anyone else asks me why I am going to India, or what my work is—which a missionary asked me point-blank—I shall reply that I am going out to do anti-missionary propaganda, and that normally I am a lavatory-attendant. . . . (But later the secret is out, and then I am invited up to the first-class for drinks, first with the purser, next with the first-officer, and finally with the Commander himself. Later I who have never played a single game am inveigled into presenting the prizes for the ship's sports. . . .)

'Opportunities for reading'. That is what the snubby-faced missionary who asked me what my work was declared shipboard life offered. He said it smugly, in reply to a remark I had made on the emptiness of the long idle days at sea. He himself was reading *The Church's Ministry*. No less priggishly I lay aside *The Essays of Montaigne* for the *Tales of Chekhov*, but all around are the shrieks of children, in joy, anger, or distress, and a demon-child keeps passing and re-passing on a wooden motor-car and honking a shrill horn, and there are the cries of the quoits players, 'One for red,' 'One for white,' and my mind wanders to the widow in *Happy as Larry* fanning her husband's grave to dry the clay—she having promised not to remarry till it be dry—and intoning monotonously, "One for life and one for death." Above the shrieks of the children, and the cries and exclamations of the quoits players, come the dirge-like voices of the hymn-singing missionaries, and superimposed upon all this the bull-like bellow of the Quartermaster announcing the tote, and reminding all interested that there will be no tote the next day, when we reach Port Said. There should be in every passenger ship a Quiet Room for the non-games-playing and those tired of shipboard conversations, where they may read, write, or contemplate in peace.

Various people have warned us that it is 'inadvisable' to go ashore unaccompanied at Port Said. The Quartermaster has assured us there is 'nothing to see there', and our Brahmin friend has told us that he refused to allow his twenty-one year old son to go ashore there on his way to England. He calls it 'the cess-pool of Europe'.

Nevertheless, after a week at sea it will be pleasant to walk on something that does not vibrate or heave underfoot. And it is a new place, and the gateway of the East at that.

II

PORT SAID, SUEZ, ADEN

THE 'cess-pool' looks pleasant enough in the cool sunny early morning. There are tall yellow-brown buildings with wooden verandahs, palm trees, a blue-domed mosque, and tree-lined avenues running up from the quays . . . to the centre of this city of 'feelthy peektures', brothels, touts. Aldous Huxley[1] has declared that the manufacture and sale of indecent photographs is the staple industry of this city of which he exclaims, 'What a sink!'

Touts there are a-plenty, outside every shop, inviting you to 'come in—have a look!', swarming round the moment you pass through the port barrier, wanting to take your photograph, 'ready in two minutes', wanting you to ride in frowsy open horse-drawn cabs, offering you strings of cheap beads at preposterous prices which they don't expect to get; but if you are a woman you are at least spared the 'dirty pictures'. Simon Artz' large emporium is clearly visible from the ship, and many of the passengers go no farther afield; there they buy leather purses and wallets engraved with the Sphinx and Pyramids and Egyptian signs and symbols, and other souvenirs; some get into cabs and are driven round the quays. All the shops offer the same things—ivories, cheap showy jewellery, nylons, perfumes, leather pouffes, cream leather handbags garishly decorated with pyramids and palms in livid colours, bright yellow travelling bags, crepe-soled shoes for men, white-strapped sandals for women, vivid silk head-scarves.

Very much the same things are hawked from boats which row out to the liner the moment she drops anchor, and the great play of bargaining goes on between the vendors standing up in the rocking boats and the passengers crowded along the rail on every deck. It all goes on non-stop until the ship sails—usually for some six hours, that is to say. The starting price of almost everything, from a leather pouffe to a pair of lady's sandals, is, for some reason, usually 'two pounds ten'. After the routine haggling the passenger usually gets it eventually for thirty or twenty-five shillings. When the bargain is clinched the man in the boat throws a thin rope up to his customer and ties the other end to a straw basket containing the article; the passenger hauls the basket up, and sends the money back in the basket—and any passenger who has agreed to pay twenty-five shillings and sends down thirty is very green indeed if he thinks he is going to get any change.

The banter which goes on with the bargaining is sometimes acrimonious, sometimes amusing. A swarthy skinned gentleman wearing a bright red fez has a placard in his boat announcing himself as

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[1] In *Jesting Pilate*, 1926.

'Harry Lauder'. There are sometimes two 'Harry Lauders'—and I have seen Harry Lauders coming out in boats at Madeira and at Canary Island ports. When they are not Harry Lauder they are McGregor.

A passenger calls down to one of the boats:

"How much for the crepe-soled shoes?"

"Two pound ten," comes the inevitable reply.

"One pound," retorts the passenger.

The gentleman in the red fez looks hurt.

"You very tight!" he calls up, and closes a fist tightly in demonstration.

"Tight yourself!" the passenger calls back, cheerfully, and inquires, "How long did it take you to row down from Tel-Aviv?"

If the gentleman in the red fez has no manners—and he often hasn't—he blows a raspberry at this. One untrustworthy looking creature does this so continually that some of the passengers turn away in disgust.

"Hi, you, Ali Farouk!" a passenger calls down.

"My name not Ali Farouk! My name Harry Lauder!" He points to the sign in his boat.

"Turn it over! What's on the other side?"

There is an impudent grin.

"All right, Mr. McGregor. How much? For this fine bag—you say how much?"

The whole length of the great ship there are the shrill clamorous cries from the laden boats, the retorts and the banter from the passengers. When a passenger completes a deal a small crowd gathers round to inspect the 'bargain'. The passenger is always very proud of having 'beaten him down'. The chief traffic is in leather pouffes, travelling bags, handbags, silk head-scarves. A lesser traffic is done in boxes of dates, chocolates, Turkish delight, coloured baskets. It is endlessly fascinating to watch, even when one is not oneself interested in purchasing anything, and it is a diversion for the passengers who don't go ashore.

More passengers than not go ashore, even those who have been before and know there is 'nothing there'. The female passengers seem to think it necessary to put on hats to go ashore, with the result that some are almost unrecognisable—their personalities eclipsed by this unaccustomed millinery.

However, one of us does not possess a hat, and the seldom-worn hats of the other are in far-away London, so bareheaded we descend the steps roped to the side of the ship and cross the pontoon bridge to the touts waiting to pounce at the other side of the barrier where you show your ship's pass and prove that you have no camera with you. We refuse to be photographed, to get into a cab, to 'come in and look', to change money, to buy necklaces or postcards, or to engage a guide. We march firmly past Simon Artz and a Woolworths-in-name-only, and

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to escape the pestiferous horde plunge down the first turning we come to. Even here every shop doorway has its lurking spider inviting you with a most untrustworthy smile to walk into its parlour just to 'look'. The need, we discover, as we stride past, is not for hats to cover our heads but for veils with which to cover the nakedness of our faces—so relentless and, one might say, far-reaching, is the Port Said leer. It is an impudent leer which manages to suggest that it is welcomed; it is an undressing leer, and it is peculiar to old and young alike.

"Don't look now, dear, but there's a gentleman almost falling off his bicycle to ogle you!"

"This is frightful! There must be *some* nice Egyptian gentlemen!"

"They probably don't live in Port Said."

After the first embarrassment and confusion we begin to get used to it, and even to feel a little truculent.

"All right, my boy! Leer away! Here come two naked women—naked from the crown of the head right down to the neck!"

There are not many women on the streets, the few there are nearly all wear the *burka*, a hooded robe which either completely covers the face, with a gauze slit for the eyes, or leaves the forehead bare, a brass ornament reaching down over the bridge of the nose and securing the material below the unveiled eyes. Some of the women 'cheat', the material across the face being so transparent that the features are clearly visible; other women are so heavily veiled that they look as though they have coal-sacks over their heads. Very often the *burka* is black, which produces a nun-like effect from behind.

We are in a street of tall brown houses which seem to be made chiefly of wood; there are ornate wooden balconies and numerous wooden shutters; they look shabby and shoddy and a little sinister. At each side of the road there are trees with large fern-like leaves and very long dry pods. There are even stranger trees with long rope-like aerial roots danging from their branches. We gaze at them in wonder. It is not until we reach India where they abound that we learn that they are banyan trees. There is an occasional purple gleam of bougainvillea against a wall, and once in a garden the sudden scarlet flame of poinsettia. We turn at random down a narrower street—all ways being one to us—and find ourselves in a market.

With this turn into the narrow market street we plunge into the East. We are in the Arab quarter. Here there are no unveiled women, and no Europeans but ourselves. Male costume ranges from European-modified to full Arabian; a lounge-suit jacket or sports' coat may be worn over a white shirt reaching almost to the ground; when a pull-over is also worn over the robe-like shirt the effect is curious. Male head-dress is either a red fez or a dirty white turban. Brown faces regard us with curiosity, sometimes with frank amusement, but these people do not leer. White-turbaned old men with long pointed beards peer out at us from the doorways of dark cave-like cafés; they look like something out of the Bible. Bright-eyed barefooted children stand and stare and laugh. There are swarms of them—dirty, thin, and dancing with life.

Sometimes a brown face grins across a great pile of oranges and bananas; but there is nothing but good-natured amusement in the grin; we are the funny foreigners. All right, we are funny, with our unveiled faces and our bare arms and legs.

Outside a dark little shop a dark-skinned boy who seems to wear nothing but a long white nightshirt, stands by crates full of live turkeys; he offers us a turkey, hopefully eager; we shake our heads and he offers us a live duck, even more hopefully, but we feel we wouldn't know what to do with either aboard ship. We similarly decline a basket full of live pigeons offered us by a woman squatting on the ground. There are a few beggars—mere bundles of dirty white rags they seem. Suddenly the words, 'the halt, the maimed and the blind', have new meaning. It is the East all right—unchanged since Biblical times in many of its aspects—of which its beggar population is one. The maimed, yes, the deliberately maimed from childhood—but that is something we don't realise till much later. . . .

Coming straight from Europe this sudden precipitation into the East is bewildering. I had seen it all before, in Turkestan, but that is fifteen years ago, and though the mind-pictures have not dimmed, the feel of it has. For this impact of the East is something you do not merely see but feel—the swarming, teeming, survival-of-the-fittest vitality of a starvation-level of poverty drenched in centuries of sun that keeps the blood warm even when the body is thin. In the towns it is a kind of stray-cat poverty that somehow manages to scrounge a living from the refuse-heaps and the gutters; and the gutters themselves are very often refuse-heaps, running with water, choked with banana and orange skins, the excrement of humans and cattle.

In this Port Said market-street there are booths stacked with oranges and tangerines with their leaves attached, and great branches of green bananas, and dates, and purple fruits whose names we do not know, and strings of garlic, and barrow-loads of onions, and of sugar-cane. The man hawking the sugar-cane cuts off a piece from the end of a long bamboo-like stem and chews it; the flies rise up in a black buzzing cloud, then resettle. A man squats on the ground in a three-sided tent turning pots on a wheel; he is surrounded by pots of every shape and size. He would make a good photograph. So would an alleyway opening off the street and offering a glimpse of the white cupola of a mosque with the tall thin towers of its minarets and a palm-tree leaning across. We regret that we were not allowed to bring our cameras ashore.

But there is so much that a camera would not convey—though a painting might—the perpetual movement of the ragged mass, seemingly directionless, bodies brushing bodies in the narrow congested the world's greatest religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism.

In the morning we enter the Red Sea. It is our second Sunday at sea. The sun is pleasantly hot, whereas we had shivered in the Canal. It is odd, 'East of Suez', hearing church-bells ring out summoning the orthodox to Divine Service. Later we discover that they are relayed from a gramophone record. The sea is dark blue, flanked by the high jagged Arabian mountains. At night great flashes of lightning zig-zag down the sky. There seems a new depth to the sky's darkness.

The next day the crew and stewards and ship's officers all get into whites. There is a high hot wind. The third engineer says that at ten o'clock at night the temperature is 80 degrees. The male passengers are now in whites and shorts, though even now a few still stick to collars and ties and lounge-suits. Wind-funnels are fixed to the port-holes. Passengers who complained of the coldness in the canal now begin to complain of the heat. The Goanese crew are busy fixing up an awning over the sports' deck.

Goa is Portuguese India, south of Bombay, and associated with the five months' Indian apostolate of St. Francis Xavier. The tourist-class stewards, both table and cabin, are Goanese; they have Portuguese names—such as Rodriguez—and are Roman Catholics.

In the first-class the stewards are all white. This is presumably considered an advantage, though the white stewards could not be more efficient than our coloured ones. But we are troubled about them because they always look depressed and never seem to smile—other passengers besides ourselves have remarked this. We would like to form some sort of human contact with them, but they know only a very limited English and we find it impossible; there is nothing we can do but smile and be pleasant and say please and thank-you most meticulously, and trust that they perceive that despite our white skins we are not memsahibs.

(Later in the journey we realise that whether we like it or not—and we don't like it—we are nevertheless memsahibs.)

The ship's notes tell us that there are 'labyrinths of coral reefs running parallel to the shore on both sides'. That 'seaweed covers large tracts of the water with a reddish brown scum' we can see for ourselves, and it is interesting to learn that this 'red' seaweed gives the adjective to the Sea. It is probably as good a guess as any.

'King Solomon had ships stationed at the Northern end of the Red Sea and the Queen of Sheba, visiting Solomon, embarked either at Aden or Hodeidah.'

That Solomon had his navy stationed in the Red Sea is set forth in the *Book of Kings*, but there is no authority for the assertion that the Queen of Sheba went by sea on her famous visit, and no reason to suppose she did, for she made the journey 'with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold', and there is no mention of any ship. In *Chronicles* she is reported as coming 'with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance and precious stones', but again no mention of a ship. Had there been one it would no doubt have been like Cleopatra's barge, with sail of cloth-of-gold, and the winds love-sick with the beauty of the 'queen of the south' no less than for the queen of Egypt; the sailing would have been further magnificence added to the already lavish tale.

But whether the Queen of the South went by sea or land to visit King Solomon in all his glory it is clear that the compiler of the ship's notes had a lively imagination.

There are numerous flying fish, brilliant silver against the dark blue sea; they are like tiny silver birds leaping against the waves and skimming the sea's surface. There is a high hot wind and a heavy swell. In the evening we pass the group of rocky islets, The Twelve Apostles.

Everyone says how hot it is, but the Quartermaster is in agreement with us that it is 'not all that hot'. The faces of the passengers are disappearing behind dark glasses. I am with Aldous Huxley in this matter of being able to look into the sun. In his little book, *The Art of Seeing*,[1] it may be recalled, he comments on the idea grown up in recent years that strong light is bad for the eyes, and points out that before the first World War it was extremely rare to see anyone wearing dark glasses. Nowadays they are considered *chic*. He refers to 'this fantastic craze for blacking out the eyes', adding that one can acquire 'an addiction to goggles just as one can acquire an addiction to tobacco or alcohol'.

Black glasses, though they cover only the eyes, contrive to obliterate the face. It is as difficult to talk to someone wearing them as to a woman in a *burka*.

The approach to Aden is promising. There are jagged masses of black volcanic rock rising sheer from a blue-green sea streaked with violet shadows. There is something Gothic in the tower-like pinnacles, the romantic castellations. This is surely the landscape of a dream, of a Paul Delvaux painting, of caverns measureless to man, of valleys in which there are no shadows—a savage and enchanted place, of a wild strange beauty.

But the enchantment ends with the approach. As the ship draws closer to the black volcanic mass, Aden is revealed in all its relentless aridity—'this sorry place', Paul Morand called it,[2] 'this dull stove cracked by the hell-fire which Nature keeps up in it the year round'. It almost never rains there—so they say. Water is obtained for the civic supply from deep wells and from a seven-mile aqueduct built in 1876. The heat is aggravated by the complete shadelessness; there is almost no vegetation. Near the harbour there are some dusty public gardens with a few trees and shrubs. There is a golf course without a blade of grass. Dotted about the black rock face there are the white air-conditioned bungalows of the Europeans reached by steps cut into the rock. By the verandah of one a gallant attempt has been made to grow a few shrubs; they look like thin starved birch saplings clinging to the rock in a handful of soil brought from heaven knows where.

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[1] Chatto & Windus, 1943.

[2] In *Earth Girdled* (Knopf, 1928).

The European offices and bungalows are concentrated round the harbour, and there is a street of shops catering for tourists from the ships, and behind there are some narrow and dirty Arab streets full of half-naked children, goats with their udders in canvas bags and bits of sacking, and a variety of evil smells. These streets run up into the black rock face of the cliff. Caves in the rock-face are inhabited by human beings. A shadeless road sweeps up and round the cliff-face and drops down into Aden proper—the 'crater town', so-called because the hollow surrounded by the black rock in which it huddles is thought to be the crater of an extinct volcano. The bare masses of rock rise up all round it, and there is not a green leaf or a blade of grass to be seen.

Most tourists, it seems, get no farther than the few shops near the harbour; they are nervous of penetrating the Arab streets behind, and do not bother with the Arab town or the crater town. Turning into one of these back streets we heard a middle-aged gentleman expostulate to his wife, "Now, dear, not too far—you know we were warned not to go into the back-streets." A plague of children clamouring for *baksheesh* is, however, the only 'danger'—in our experience, and even that can be evaded by walking fast and getting away from the streets round the harbour—the happy hunting ground for souvenirs for the people from the liners, and therefore of the beggars.

In the public gardens a notice in English commands the visitor 'not to pluck the flowers or trees'. The flowers consist of some yellow acacia-like blossoms on scrawny trees, and a bed of colourless clover. Everything is dry and dusty and arid. Men and boys lie asleep on the benches and on the ground. We were plagued to buy postcards and, oddly, wooden spoons. A small boy, angry that we would give no *baksheesh*, follows us exclaiming, 'You come into our gardens and you want everything for nothing.' But it was too hot to work out the reasoning of this—that because we walked through the municipal gardens we should subscribe to small boys collecting in aid of themselves.

In January the sun was so strong that it had a stinging quality. It was like being too near a hot fire. We neither covered our heads nor put on dark glasses, but we felt a great need to cover our bare arms, despite all the days at sea when they had been freely exposed to the sun.

The crater town is five miles out from the harbour. The Arab town still farther out. It is a place of wide dirty streets, dark cafés, and dreadful hovels of human habitations—mere huts composed of any

The Gateway of India, Bombay

oddments of old corrugated iron and broken boards and bits of sacking that could be raked together. There are people squatting in the dust making pots, weaving, spreading out dyed lengths of material on the ground to dry. There is a traffic of camel carts—the most common form of vehicle in Aden—moving in a cloud of dust, a busyness of men and camels in the desert-like wastes of the salt-workings, across which a pipe-line runs out to the water-works. The exposed pipe must surely mean that the water brought up from the wells must be hot long before it reaches the town. Amongst the sand and salt there is an R.A.F. barracks of hutments.

The 'botanic gardens' out beyond the Arab town possess a few patches of long rough grass, and maize is cultivated in furrows in the dusty earth under the tall palm-trees. It is an uncared-for looking wilderness of a place, but at least it offers a patch of shade. There was no one in it the afternoon we drove through, except two little girls who ran after our car crying '*Baksheesh!*'

There is also a Jewish town, the 'gates' of which are closed at sundown—that is to say barbed wire barricades are pushed across the ends of the streets.

The 'thing to do' in Aden—apart from some sideshow nonsense about a 'mermaid'—is to visit 'the tanks'. These are crater-like holes at the bottom of black ravines of bare rock. Their antiquity is unknown. There is, naturally, no water in them. These tanks have been made into a show-place for tourists, with an admission fee, and a plague of would-be guides. They are reached through arid gardens, dusty, dried-up, with a few monkeys in captivity, and some scrawny trees and bushes. The sun beats down upon the bare rock which thrusts jagged points to the cloudless sky. There is something dreadful about this place; it is like being at the bottom of a crater.

I have disliked places before for their ugliness or their desolation or aridity, but in no place have I known such a curious oppression of spirit, a feeling of an evilness not of man's making. Port Said suggests human corruption; Aden has its own dark evil of natural forces. It is the evil of the volcano; there is something Satanic in its blackness, its terrible drouth, its shadelessness and lack of vegetation. It is a place not meant for human habitation. Human beings were not meant to live on black volcanic rock-faces, and in the bottom of craters, in a place where it almost never rains.

At the tanks our one desire was to get away—away from the bare burning rock closing in on all sides, towering over us, descending beneath us. The dust and squalor of the streets is preferable to this lonely, inexplicable series of pits within a pit.

There are a few lilac-like trees at the base of some broken steps leading up to the ruins of a mosque above one of the tanks, and there is an arid garden with steps and arbours, and again the ironic request 'not to pick the flowers and trees'.

Typical Bombay architecture ; the Museum

That anyone who has ever known real trees, and flowers and grass and green fields and blessed cool showers, could endure to live a few weeks, let alone months and years, in this cinder-heap of a place seems incredible—day after day nothing but the burning hot masses of black rock utterly devoid of vegetation, but we were assured that the Europeans enjoy life there. Some months later, on our return journey, we met a man who had been living in Aden, and for him the ship was going the wrong way. The first glimpse of the English spring when we berthed at Tilbury merely irritated him, and when, seeking to rouse him from his home-coming depression, I pointed out a flowering lilac tree, he merely observed drily that I was in 'a singular sloppy mood' that morning. "Give me Aden!" he said, scowling at the English spring and shivering in the April air.

You can live very comfortably in Aden, it seems, in an air-conditioned bungalow, with plenty of native servants to pick up a handkerchief if you drop it, and bring you iced drinks at any moment. You make no attempt to work in the afternoons, and there are clubs at which to meet your fellow Europeans in the evenings and drink whisky and play bridge and gossip.

At home, too—though this is not mentioned in praise of European life in the East—you might be a nobody, a clerk or cashier or assistant-manager; but in Aden, as in India, the mere fact that you are white makes you a somebody. You command a far higher salary than you would at home, and you also command not a servant but servants. Even a clerk in India, if he is white, is a person of minor importance, with black subordinates at the office and native servants at home to order around. As Huxley has observed,[1] 'He may be ill-bred, stupid, uneducated; no matter. His skin is white. Superiority in India is a matter of epiderm. No wonder if he loves the East.'

No wonder, in such circumstances, that England's green and pleasant land dwindles to a chilly uncomfortable island where whisky is scarce and expensive, where a char-woman does you a favour by giving you her services for half a day a week, or less, and, moreover, nowadays expects to be treated as an equal ('People are so independent these days!'), and where you are a nonentity instead of a person of consequence—a sahib.

Port Said is an introduction to the East in general; Aden is an introduction to India itself.

Back on board the third engineer inquired, "Well, did you see the mermaid?"

"Oh, rather," we assured him. "She's lovely, isn't she?"

But the third engineer merely looked confused.

Rolling across the Arabian Sea in a high hot wind we spread a large map of India out on the deck and pored over it with the Tagore-reading Hindu planning routes. On the hatch close by another Indian was playing Indian songs and dance music on a portable gramophone. When he put on Gandhi's Spiritual Message we abandoned the map and gathered round. Our Brahmin friend called to a missionary near us to "come and hear the voice of God". The missionary refused, asserting that Gandhi was not God. "God spake through him," the Indian declared, as vehemently as he had declared that God was in his rice. "God is in everyone," he went on, with a smiling flash of wonderful teeth, "He is in me; He is in you." . . . The Missionary remained adamant. Earlier in the day he had told this devout Hindu that unless he accepted Jesus Christ he would be damned in hell-fire eternally . . . to which the Hindu smilingly replied, with admirable simplicity, "I do not think so."

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[1] In *Jesting Pilate.*

(This same missionary had told a white passenger that his soul was 'on the rocks'. To which the passenger replied, cheerfully, that that was all right; he had bought some crepe-soled shoes at Port Said and would 'hang on'.)

Imposed upon all the shipboard noises came the soft but strong voice of Mahatma Gandhi, almost a year after his death, a low but clear voice, with only a faint accent. It was the first time we had heard it.

> 'There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses, but it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. . . . There is orderliness in the universe. There is an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings. . . . The law . . . which governs all life is God—the law and the law-giver are one.
>
> 'I may not deny the law or the law-giver because I know so little about it or him. . . . I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves, and recreates.
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> 'That informing power or spirit is God. . . . God is life, truth, light. . . . He is love. He is the supreme good. . . .
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> 'He who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence can do so by a living faith, and since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law, the law of truth and love. . . .
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> 'I have no argument to convince through reason; faith transcends reason.' . . .

A pity that Christian missionary was too bigoted to come and listen . . . to the voice of truth and love.

How fantastic that throughout history human beings have been imprisoning, torturing, and murdering each other in the name of God . . . who is life, truth, light, and love.

The two countries in the world where religion and politics are inextricably bound up with each other—India and Ireland. It ought not to matter what another person's religious beliefs are, but in these two countries it most nationalistically does. And 'Pakistan' raises the same degree of political passion as does the Irish question of the Six Counties. Pakistan is the Ulster of the sub-continent, but the Pakistanis are much more passionate about their independence than the Indians are about their ambition for a United India. The Indians are deeply opposed to partition, but they believe that eventually it will be ended. No Pakistani believes that. Any more than any Orangeman believes there will ever be a time when the Six Counties, erroneously defined for political purposes as 'Ulster', will ever become part of a United Ireland.

Two days from Bombay I lean against the ship's rail with an Englishman and a Hindu and for once the talk is not of religion or Pakistan, but of happiness. What is happiness? Is it absence of worry or grief—a mere animal contentment? Is it satisfaction—Havelock Ellis's 'deepest organic satisfaction'? The Hindu suggests that the peasant lying idling in the sun, asleep under a tree, is happier than the rich man who has cares and responsibilities. The Englishman—who is young—is inclined to confuse pleasure with happiness. I suggest that it is all a matter of definition—let us be clear whether we mean pleasure or happiness, contentment or ecstasy; the lyric ecstasy of the lover is happiness; so is the religious ecstasy of the saint.

Are we three happy now? It is not my definition of happiness. I would say that I was neither happy nor unhappy. That I was 'all right'. It is a negative condition—I am all right when I am unconscious, alseep. But the Englishman insists that he is happy now, because he feels fit, and the sun shines, and in a minute he is going to drink a pint of beer. The Hindu declares that he is made happy by the sight of roses —especially if he has grown them himself—but the roses could not make him happy if, for example, his child were ill or he had quarrelled with his wife, or had any other pain or worry.

The Indian, who loves to talk as he loves to laugh, eat rice, and read Tagore, is prepared to continue the discussion all the morning, but the deck-steward appears with a tray of glasses, and the Englishman, declaring that his happiness is now complete, goes off. The Indian and I are joined by a Pakistani who can think and talk nothing but Pakistan, and shortly I make an excuse to slip away. . . .

The sea is dark blue and pond-flat. The sun is hot, and there is a high wind. There is activity in the swimming-pool. Many people huddle under the awning which shuts out the sun. The Quartermaster and I are still agreed that it is 'not all that hot'.

I talk with a young Irish Salesian brother going to China. I know nothing about this order and he lends me a book about St. Francis de Sales. It is strangely moving—and nostalgic—to hear the soft southern Irish voice again. There is another brother with him, also Irish. There is about them both that peculiarly Irish-Catholic devoutness and goodness. I have met their like in Ireland, among both priests and laity, and nowhere else. They, too, are missionaries, to be sure—but missionaries with a difference, like the nuns. These two will work with poor boys in China, in the tradition of the founder of their Order in France.

At 11.30 p.m. on Sunday, January 30, the eve of the anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, we saw the lights of Bombay. We berthed at three the next morning, but few people went to bed that night, and the decks were as crowded at midnight as at mid-day.

The Indians are excited at their first glimpse of home after years. We also are excited, but rather fearfully, for now we are come to this strange country, such a very foreign country, and such a completely unknown quantity.

It is said that you get the smell of Bombay from three miles out. There is certainly a point at which you do get it, hours before you berth; it is a warm smell, not readily definable, but it has to do with joss-sticks and horse-dung, the hot smell of thronging streets, the smell of spiced foods cooked at booths in crowded bazaars. The smell of the East.

Imposing brown buildings, palm-trees, then the quayside and an ant-like swarm of coolies. There seem to be thousands of these blue-smocked, brown-faced turbaned figures. They cling to the gang-plank as ants cling to a twig; they almost conceal it and the ropes with their bodies, their hands, their legs. The whole quay is moving with them. In odd corners whole families lie on the ground, sleeping, men and women and naked children.

The swarming, teeming East. We gaze and gaze with eyes burning with tiredness, and finally go below to get a few hours sleep before disembarking and coming to grips with this overwhelming newness and strangeness hitherto so glibly referred to as 'India' . . . a pear-shaped place on a map, and a dot marked Bombay. This is it. . . .

III

THE GATEWAY OF INDIA: BOMBAY

THE *Encyclopædia Britannica* states categorically that 'No city in the world has a finer water-front than Bombay.' That cuts out Manhattan. It also claims Bombay as 'one of the first cities in the world'. It concedes that the public buildings 'are not individually distinguished for architectural merit', but maintains that 'they have a cumulative effect of great dignity'.

On the other hand, Aldous Huxley declares, no less categorically,[1] that 'architectually, Bombay is one of the most appalling cities of either hemisphere'.

Neither of these authorities refers to the most outstanding architectural work in Bombay—outstanding because it stands isolated at the end of an arm of the harbour—which is 'the Gateway of India'. This is a massive stone erection which is a cross between the Marble Arch and the Tower of London; it is a solid block of masonry; a kind of Oriental Arc de Triomphe, with a tower at each corner, and a Mohammedan-style entrance arch in each of its four sides.

The low parapet of the three sides of harbour-arm on which it stands is a favourite resort of Bombay idlers, nearly all male. Every afternoon and evening it is almost impossible to find a place to sit on the parapet, so packed is it with the bareheaded white-clad figures. Women and children sometimes squat on the marble pavement inside the arch, where it is cool and mosque-like, but khaki-uniformed policemen, with puttees which look all wrong worn with sandals, periodically shoo them out with a wave of a *lathi*, the Indian version of the truncheon. There are always vendors of roast nuts and *pan* at the Gateway of India.

Pan—pronounced 'pahn'—is the Indian equivalent of chewing-gum; it is chewed by both Moslems and Hindus, and by women as well as men. In middle and upper class homes it is often passed round after meals. It is a kind of sandwich made of the green betel leaf smeared with lime and rolled round a few nuts, usually assorted—betel and cachou—and cloves. It is popped whole into the mouth—and it tastes like the smell of crushed ivy.

I made two attempts to chew *pan*, urged by my hostess on each occasion, but it was no good, the strong astringent pungency seemed to me horrible in the extreme and I had to retreat and spit it out privily. Goldleaf is sometimes an additional ingredient of *pan* in well-to-do families. The teeth of the regular *pan* eater become stained crimson, and in every Indian city the pavements look as though everywhere people have been spitting blood—the spitting seems to be as much a part of this *pan* eating as sneezing is part of snuff-taking.

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[1] In *Jesting Pilate.*

The women chew *pan* to redden their lips. They carry special little silk bags, decorated with beads or embroidery, or the gold or silver tinsel ribbon they so delight in, and gathered up with a cord, in which they carry small gold or brass boxes containing the *pan*, kept fresh with a piece of betel-impregnated cloth on the top. Their fingers are as stained with *pan* as the fingers of heavy cigarette smokers are with nicotine—though some Indian women smoke cigarettes as well as chew *pan*, we observed. The frequency with which our female travelling companions on the trains everywhere dipped into their *pan* boxes was irresistibly reminiscent of the cigarette addict lighting one cigarette after another in rapid succession. It does, in fact, become just as much a habit as nicotine. To the Western mind it can only seem a singularly unpleasant habit, not only on account of the stained teeth and lips and fingers, but because of the disgusting amount of spitting it seems to involve.

The pavement all round the Gateway of India is red with the sputum of the *pan* eaters, and white with the droppings of sea-gulls.

Apart from *pan*, and a variety of nuts and seeds for chewing, you can buy at the Gateway of India singularly repellent coloured balloons for children—nightmare faces swelling at the end of long snake-like necks of pink, blue or green.

From the Gateway of India—built to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to Bombay in 1911—you look out over the islands of the Bay. There are white motor-launches and white-sailed yachts, and across the Bay, by the docks, liners and cargo-boats, from China and Australia, from Europe, and the half-way house, Port Said. You look one way to the peninsula of Malabar Hill, at the far end of which Government House stands in well-kept gardens—not so well kept now that the British have gone, they say—and the sides of which are terraced by hanging-gardens of brilliant flowering shrubs and heavily scented blossoming trees. The view across the bay and city from Malabar Hill is very fine, and you may sit in a café in the hanging-gardens and eat delicious ice-cream and fruit-juice concoctions and drink iced drinks. There are three floors to the café, and the drinks and ices cost more the higher you go, on the principle, presumably, that the higher the better the view.

There is no better way of seeing Bombay than to get on to the top of a double-decker bus at the Flora Fountain and travel in it out to Malabar Hill. There is a more direct route in a single-decker bus, but the double-decker takes you right through the old town—'the native quarter' as it used to be called. In this way you get glimpses into domestic interiors devoid of furniture, and vistas of narrow side-streets packed with black-headed white-clad crowds. The streets of Bombay are everywhere crowded, but in the old part of the city they are so densely crowded that the impression is of a seething black and white mass. You suddenly realise what the expression 'the teeming millions of the East' really means. Teeming is the one adjective always coming into the mind on the streets of Bombay.

In the bazaar quarter the shops open on to the street, and the shopkeeper squats on the floor or reclines on a *charpoy*, a wooden bedstead covered with webbing or strong string; from somewhere at the back of the shop comes, very often, the incense smell of burning joss-sticks. Men and boys, almost invariably wearing the white *dhoti*, squat on the floors of tailoring shops turning the handles of sewing-machines, stitching the gold or silver tinsel borders on to the *sari* lengths of silk usually of brilliant colours, machining the long white shirts worn by the men over their *dhotis*, making European suits and dresses for the Europeans, and the people who used to be called Eurasians but who are now commonly referred to as Anglo-Indians.

As numerous as the tailors' shops are the flower shops, where the slender brown fingers of those who squat on the floor—Indians almost invariably have fine hands—make *lehs* of marigolds or carnations or jasmine for hanging round the necks of people going on journeys, or arriving; both men and women, old and young, are garlanded with these flower necklaces. It is a charming custom, but *lehs* do not combine well with European clothes, particularly masculine clothes. English people, somehow, merely look self-conscious and odd when they struggle up the gang-plank of liners at Bombay, with the garlands gracefully presented to them by their Indian friends hanging round their necks. The *leh* does not 'belong' with the English woman's hat and short skirt, or the English man's lounge suit or sports' clothes. It belongs with the dazzling whiteness of Indian male costume, whether *dhoti* or 'pyjamas', or the flower-like colours of the Indian woman's *sari*.

Heavily scented jasmine flowers are threaded into chains for women to twist in their hair. Strings and strings of these threaded flowers hang outside the flower shops and fruit shops, and are hawked on the railway stations, and very charming the jet black hair of the women looks, coiled on the nape of the neck with the wax-like flowers twisted into the plait. Very often the Indian woman chooses the flowers for her hair to match or tone with the colour of her *sari*—one of our Indian hostesses told me she 'didn't feel right' without a flower in her hair. All over the country, in the North and in the South, women are addicted to this graceful custom. In the South even the poorest women and the little girls twist a chain of jasmine flowers into their plait, whether they wear it coiled on the nape of the neck or down the back; the woman without flowers in her hair is the rare exception.

There are jewellery shops hung with thousands of bangles—of glass, brass, gold, silver, for every Indian woman wears bangles, whatever her class, usually dozens of them. They have both religious and social significance.[1] A woman will carry the whole wealth of the family in the jewellery on her person—the ornate ear-rings, neck ornaments, and very often nose-rings. Even a beggar woman has her bangles, and usually ear-rings and necklaces as well. Diamond nose studs are worn by the higher caste women, the nostrils pierced for it as the ears are pierced for ear-rings.

There are silk shops stacked with rolls and rolls of exquisite silks for *saris*; shops which sell only brass and copper pots for domestic use—drinking vessels, cooking vessels, brass plates, water vessels.

On the pavement, or in the gutter, or under a tree, men and boys squat having their hair cut or being shaved. Beggars lie on the pavements asleep, their begging tins beside them. In the hot weather people sleep out in the streets, on the window ledges of banks and offices and shops, and under arcades, in preference to overcrowded rooms. Not all the people sleeping out in the streets are homeless, though many are. Many are refugees—Hindus fled from that part of their country which is now 'Pakistan'.

In Bombay the biggest refugee settlement is round the Central Station, where families live in rough shelters against a wall, in conditions of pitiable squalor. At the beginning of partition, we were told, the refugees gathered round the dock area, and many just died where they lay under the wall. 'But when Pandit Nehru came to Bombay they cleared the refugees, alive and dead, off the streets, and he didn't see anything.'

On our first morning in Bombay we ourselves found a dead man lying on the pavement on the road down to the docks. The flies were buzzing over his open mouth and eyes. His begging tin was beside him. People passed unnoticing. As there was no policeman to report the matter to we told a prosperous looking Indian getting out of a car outside some business offices; he glanced in the direction we indicated and said he would 'send someone'. Looking back we saw two men standing looking down at the body. When we passed back that way an hour or so later the corpse had been removed. The dead man's worldly goods, a bit of dirty sacking and his begging-tin, had been thrown into the gutter.

The beggars of Bombay are numerous and dreadful. Some of them are lepers displaying rotting limbs covered with sores; many of them are mutilated, many blind; and there are human beings with limbs so twisted and malformed that they can only go on all-fours. At first, shocked by so much human misery and degradation, we were always asking: "What is being done to get the beggars off the streets? The lepers should be rounded up and put in homes and cared for, and the crippled and deformed people, and the able-bodied people should be set to work." We were told: "There are homes for lepers, and there are beggars' homes, but the people will not stay in them. They prefer their independence." Others said: "How can the beggars be put to work when there is not employment enough for ordinary people?" And—"Begging is a profession; people are born into it, they rear their children to it. Some of the babies are mutilated at birth to equip them for their profession." Until then it had struck us as odd that so many people, and young children, should have missing fingers, and arms amputated—and roughly amputated at that, by the look of the stumps—above the elbow.

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[1] In an article in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (Nov. 21, 1948) Manorama Kathju, writing on *The Significance of Bangles*, says that for the Hindu woman 'bangles are the most significant and the nose ring the most peculiar of ornaments that are, above all, the visible signs of marriage. . . . The Bengali woman wears an iron bangle on her left wrist. In Gujerat glass bangles are always worn with gold ones. In the Punjab brides wear, for a specified period after marriage, a red *chuda* (graded bangle of bone from the wrist half-way to the elbow). In parts of Kathiawar, too, a characteristic ornament of the women of that region is a bone and ivory *chuda*. . . . A married woman of the United Provinces does not ever take off her bangles. When she buys new ones the bangle-seller puts these on, then breaks the old ones so that her wrists are never bare.'

The streets of Bombay are an inferno of shrill shrieking motor-horns—the drivers all seem to drive with one hand permanently on the horn—jingling carriage bells, and white-clad, blackheaded figures swarming like ants. Crossing a street is a perilous and unnerving business. Perhaps you dive down a side street to escape the noise and crowds and confusion of the main streets, but here you are followed round by a small boy with a basket and a perpetual whine of 'Mem-sahib—memsaa-hib!'

The object of this persecution is to get himself engaged as 'bearer' for any purchases you might make. As you are probably being begged from right and left at the same time, and the humid heat is causing you to sweat at every pore, with every step, the wear and tear on the nerves seems at first intolerable. Later you develop a technique of neither seeing nor hearing, take the fact that you feel as though you had stepped straight out of a hot bath and into your clothes for granted, along with being followed about and beseeched, and discover that despite the noise, the crowds, the humidity, the beggars, the horrifying sights, Bombay has its points. By the time you have been all over India and get back to Bombay you think it rather a good city; one of the better cities, and scarcely notice the beggars—you have come to accept that as a natural part of Indian city life.

Then you can be merely amused—instead of outraged like Mr. Huxley—by the pretensiousness and vulgarity of the architecture of the Taj Mahal hotel. This astonishing building is said to have been built back to front—the gardens which abut on to squalid back streets should have been facing the Marine Parade; the whole thing needs turning round. The enormous air-conditioned dining-room of the hotel strikes so cold after coming in from the oven-like streets that you shiver; when you go out, the impact of the heat from the street is intolerable. Every day there is a fresh piece of statuary carved from a solid block of ice standing in the middle of the cold-buffet, a circular help-yourself counter in the middle of the room. In the breakfast-room you can count thirty electric fans whirling like the propellers of aeroplanes. On the café-verandah, overlooking the Bay, Europeans and well-to-do Indians take morning coffee and rich cakes. On the pavement outside a man with a monkey on his shoulder invites you to contribute to the creature's support. A boy offers you a hideous coloured balloon. A one-legged man beseeches alms. All round the parapet of the Gateway of India across the road sit white-clad black-headed figures. There are very few women.

Throughout India you get the feeling that it is 'a man's world.' . . . It is rare to see a man and woman walking together. There are small groups of girl students wearing Punjabi pyjamas, and with long black plaits down their backs. Along the water-front there are *ayahs* in charge of small children. On a building in course of erection women in *saris*, and with bangles on their arms, move about the rubble carrying loads of cement or stones in baskets on their heads; other women labourers stand high up on the scaffolding working beside the men—a sight I had not seen since Moscow.

In the gardens of the university and of the museum there are brilliant flowers—scarlet poinsettia, purple bougainvillaea—and roses, marigolds, chrysanthemums all in bloom at the same time. There are tall graceful palms which somehow give dignity to the vulgar or nondescript brown façades behind. If your architectural perceptions are not too acute it is possible to find Bombay a handsome city—*pace* the quite legitimate criticisms of Mr. Aldous Huxley. There are palms in the streets as well as in the gardens, and there are banyan trees with long rope-like roots descending from the branches.

There are Chinese shoe shops, Chinese restaurants; there are ramshackle old houses smothered with dingy woodwork and balconies; there are the most expensive cars in the world, and there are bullock carts. Near the post-office, a highly ornate building, fine or frightful according to your point of view, thousands of pigeons congregate on the telephone wires and in a small railed-off enclosure surrounding a statue.

Bombay is a conglomeration of architectural styles in the worst possible taste, and a conglomeration of immense wealth and dire poverty. There are the palatial houses standing in their beautiful gardens on Malabar Hill, and there are the slums of the narrow streets of the dock area, and the old town. Every great city, all over the world, has these extremes, these violent contrasts, but just as there is no poverty so widespread or so extreme as the poverty of the East, where millions live out their lives at the starvation level of existence, so also there is no splendour like the splendour of the East—no European monarch can compete with the lavishness of the Indian princes on State occasions; they indulge in a jewelled magnificence quite unknown to the West. In London we have the fine houses of Park Lane and the slums of the East End; but by comparison with the Indian masses our slum-dwellers are unimaginably rich. In Bombay I saw a man carrying a naked child so thin that its bones seemed to be breaking through its skin; its arms and legs were mere sticks, its head a mere skull with the skin stretched over it. The man himself was starvation-thin. These two were the horrifying first of many living skeletons we were to see all over India.

An artist friend wrote me from London, asking: "What is the *appearance* of India? I cannot picture it."

I replied: "Dust, glare, flies, brown faces, white clothes, black heads, bare feet, hot-coloured flowers, gaudy *saris*, tall palms, lepers, beggars, ornate architecture, hovels, people lying on the pavements, people squatting, life lived out on the streets, and crowds, crowds, crowds. . . ."

But it is not a complete picture; India has many appearances, for there are many Indias. Bombay is not 'India' any more than London is England, or Paris France. It is only one aspect. Bombay, with its Gateway of India, is itself a gate of India, which is not a country, merely, but a vast sub-continent with numerous peoples and languages, infinite diversity. There is no one India for the traveller to describe, in a letter or a volume, to like or dislike; its vastness and its complicatedness permit of no brief summing-up.

Only one thing is common to all parts of the sub-continent—the poverty of the masses.

On our second night in Bombay a wealthy Parsee gave a dinner-party in our honour. Those who travel with rucksacks carry no evening clothes, but in any case we could not have competed with the glamourousness of the Parsee ladies in their exquisite silk *saris*. They were like butterflies, or their own brilliant Indian flowers. Our host's house was white and cool and stately, with a pillared porch on to a wide verandah with massed flowers. Because he was not merely wealthy but a connoisseur the interior was decorated in excellent taste and full of lovely things—pictures, ornaments, fine furniture, and the flowers were scarlet sprays of poinsettia, 'from the garden'.

We stood about balancing our plates and helping ourselves to strange but delicious dishes from a side-table. There was whisky and sherry. In Bombay there is prohibition in hotels and restaurants on certain days, but prohibition in India is as much of a farce as it was in America in the far-away-and-long-ago days of 'Pussyfoot Johnson.' . . .

When we had finished standing about and eating at one end of the room we sat on settees and armchairs at the other end and made conversation across great open spaces of rug-strewn parquet floor. Indian parties tend to be like that—there is none of that cosy intimate gathering-round which makes conversation easy. The room opened on to the white pillared terrace lit by a handsome brass lantern hung from the ceiling. Beyond was the blue-black darkness of the Bombay night, hot, velvet-heavy, thick with stars, full of heavy flower scents—and joss-sticks, and spices. Now and then a turbaned, barefooted 'bearer' came round with a tray of drinks, as impassive of face and silent-footed as all Indian servants. It is not done for Indian servants to wear shoes in the house, or to smile. Everyone was very charming and kind and cultured. But there was the feeling—this is not 'India', but it was an aspect of Bombay, which is a centre of the Parsees.

On Malabar Hill there are the Towers of Silence, where the Parsees expose their dead to the vultures. When the bodies are picked clean of flesh then the bones are committed to the purification of the flames. The Parsees are Zoroastrians and worship the sacred fire. Apart from their religion they are Westernised in their outlook and habits. They are light-skinned and came originally from Persia. Like the Jews they do not become absorbed into the country of their adoption, but remain separate and apart, in religion and marriage and customs. Like the Jews they have a flair for finance and big business. Mr. J. R. D. Tata, who has so far-reaching and powerful a control of so much of Indian commercial and industrial life—coal, steel, cotton, airways, oil, chemicals, and much else—is a Parsee.

In the morning we walk about listlessly in the heat with a young Pakistani who is waiting for a boat to Karachi. He has had his Leica stolen from his room in a small hotel. He says that when the police learned his Muslim name they lost all interest in the case. He should never have come to Bombay, he says, bitterly.

In the bazaar, from a shopkeeper squatting on the floor, we buy rolls of bedding—a thin mattress, with a small pillow and a couple of rugs, all of which roll up into a canvas hold-all fastened with straps. Both Europeans and Indians travel with bedding. You suddenly realise what the Biblical expression 'take up thy bed and walk' means. Now, we feel, we are ready to start on the journey properly—the journey that leads through Delhi to the jungles.

On the way to the station we pass the great burning ghat; its high walls are plastered with cinema and theatre advertisements.

At the station swarms of red-turbaned, blue-overalled coolies fall upon us the moment we step out of the taxi. We wave them all away except two, who place a rucksack and a roll of bedding apiece upon their heads, and though the howling inferno that is an Indian railway station follow them to the Frontier Mail.

IV

DELHI, AND AGRA

UNDER what is now referred to as 'the régime' there were four classes on the Indian railways—first, second, intermediate, and third. On the mail trains—which are the fast trains—there is now very often only upper-class, 'inter', and lower class. On the Frontier Mail from Bombay to Delhi there is also a super upper-class, 'air-conditioned'. On some of the long-distance trains there is first, second, and third class, but many of the second-class coaches are what was previously 'inter'; you are fortunate when travelling second if you get a second-class coach; the difference is considerable, a matter of leather seats as against wooden ones. First-class fare has been increased to nearly three times that of second, whilst the second-class fares have been considerably reduced, with the result that many people who once travelled first now travel second, and many people who could once not afford to travel second now do so, so that the first-class is more or less empty, and the second-class crowded. We never met any Europeans travelling second and were constantly assured by our fellow-countrymen that first was the 'only possible' class we could travel.

We accepted this counsel for our first journey, having no experience to draw upon, but it was our only first-class journey. Everywhere else we travelled second-class, and once did a night journey 'inter', sitting up all night—though it was by no means the first time we sat up all night. Sitting up all night in an English third-class compartment is one thing; second or intermediate class on an Indian train it is quite another. Indian train coaches are not divided into small compartments; there is a second-class bench down each side of the coach, and one down the middle. Above the side benches there is a wide rack which can be used for luggage or as a berth. Sometimes there is also a bench across one end of the coach, which is wide; there is no corridor, and each coach has its own toilet, with a washbasin, and a hole in the floor for squatting—a rail is provided for holding on to. A second-class coach theoretically holds twelve people, but you are lucky if you travel with less than sixteen.

Indian second-class travel is quite as uncomfortable as travelling 'hard' in Russia; but at least it is minus the smell. The Indian masses are bodily clean; their religion demands it. This statement, I am well aware, will be flatly contradicted by the sahibs and memsahibs of the old regime, who are convinced that the 'lower class' Indians are 'dirty'; but they have not spent days and nights herded with them, and I have. As train-travellers their habits frequently leave much to be desired—orange peel and nut-shells and scraps of food are invariably thrown on the floor of the coach, never out of the window, children upset water-vessels all over the floor, and are allowed to urinate over the floor of the toilet, standing in the doorway, instead of going properly inside to the hole; even an approximately middle-class Indian family will turn a railway compartment into a pig-sty during the first hour; but, I stick to it, the people themselves, generally speaking, are clean as to clothes and person. At least, the adults are; the children are too often covered with sores—even when the mothers are covered with jewellery and wear silk *saris*. Impetigo seems to be very common amongst Indian children.

Indian train travel is made additionally uncomfortable by reason of the bulkiness of Indian luggage. The rolls of bedding take up an enormous amount of room, and Indian families appear to travel with their entire kitchen equipment; in addition to their bedding and numerous tin trunks they carry cooking and water vessels and great straw hampers of food. All this has to be piled in to the coach, for few people are prepared to trust their luggage to the 'brake' provided for it. More often than not the upper berths are completely stacked up with baggage, and boxes and hampers are piled from floor to ceiling, so that the compartment looks like a luggage van. An entire Indian family, including four or five children, and with all its bedding and boxes and trunks and suitcases and brass vessels, will crowd into a compartment which appears to be already packed to capacity.

It is unusual for Indian husbands to travel with their wives and children. It is not forbidden for women to travel in the general compartments, but it is frowned on. There are special ladies-only compartments for women and children. After a little experience of them we avoided these compartments as much as possible, partly because Indian children put a great strain on one's affection for children, and partly because on train journeys Indian women commonly chatter all day and most of the night in high-pitched voices so shrill that they can make the Western listener's ears actually ache. They seem never to listen to each other, but to keep up the ear-splitting din in unison. Indian children on trains seem to be always either yelling or sucking at their mothers' breasts, even when they are two or three years old.

But upper-class on the Frontier Mail we travelled in comfort, with only two other women the whole way, a young and pretty and charming Hindu girl, and an old and ugly and far from charming Hindu woman. The pretty young girl boarded the train in an exquisite cream chiffon *sari*, which she later changed for a dark red one as more suitable for travelling. The old woman wore a plain white cotton *sari*; she squatted part of the journey at the end of the girl's berth; later she clambered up into her berth above to eat and to sleep. We had not been going long before she began criticising the short tight blouse which the girl wore under her *sari*, and which was so designed that it terminated above her waist, leaving a few inches of her body visible through the transparent *sari*. The girl took these criticisms from the complete stranger in good part.

"Poor thing," she said to us, in English—which the old woman did not speak or understand—"She has not been in the city before; she does not know the fashions."

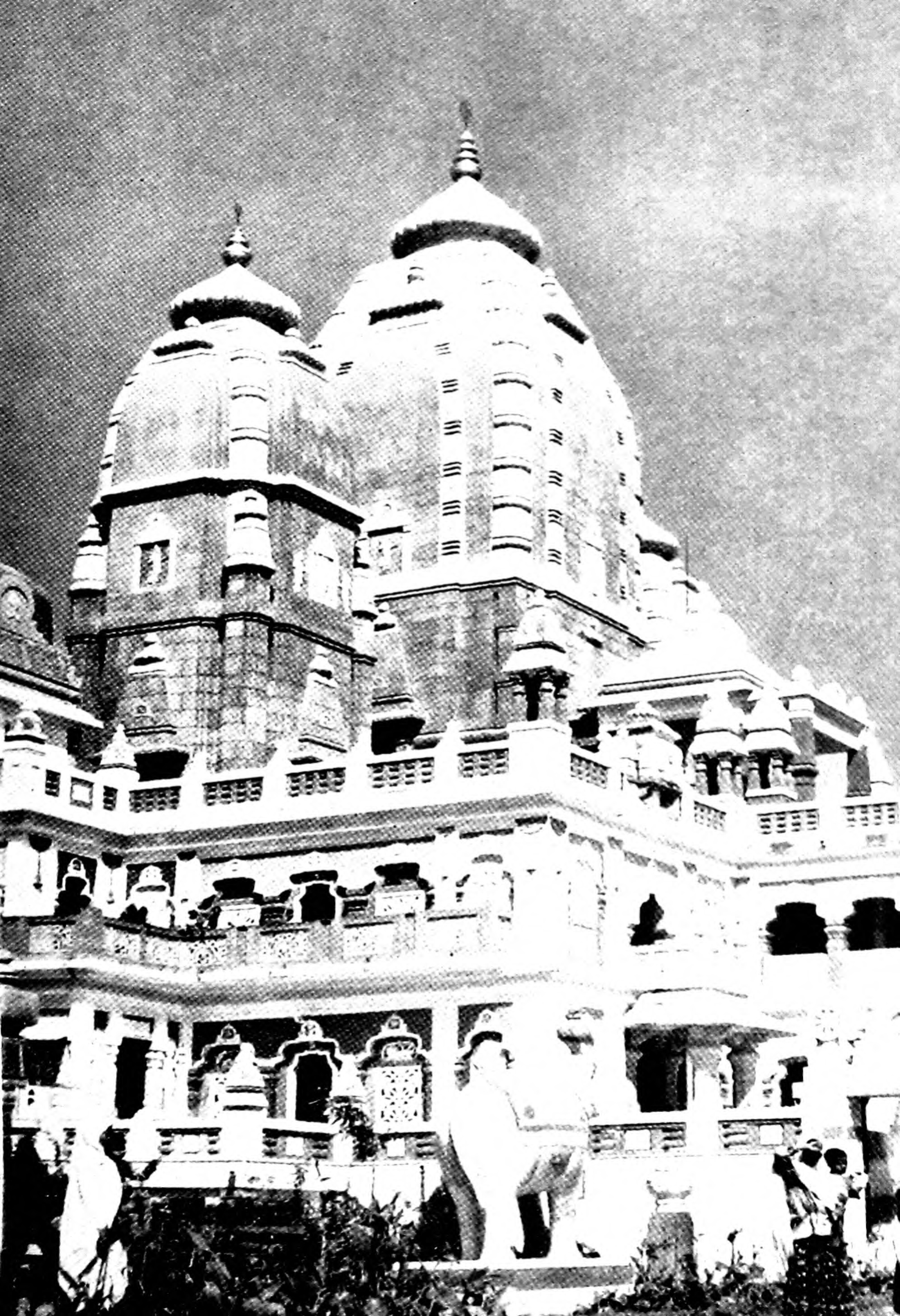
The girl had been in England and spoke excellent English. She had some interesting comments to make on the new régime, and on the refugee problem. From her we heard the first partition atrocity stories—the Moslems burning the Hindus out of their homes in what had become Pakistan; the abducted women, the usual rape stories; the fire-brigades called out to put out the fires but instead hosing kerosene on to the flames. . . . When we were in Pakistan we heard the same stories all over again as done by Hindus to Moslems. But whereas we found that the Indians were quite willing to accept that some of their people had done dreadful things in many places at that time, and would agree that bad things were done on both sides, the Pakistanis would insist that Moslems were the chief sufferers, at the hands of the Hindus, that what was done to their women, their homes, their children, was far worse and far more extensive than anything they did to the Hindus. They would insist that they had far more refugees—a point impossible to check. That there were abducted women on both sides is not disputed by the respective governments, and the question of exchange is continually being raised in Congress. There is also a great deal of wrangling on both sides over confiscated property, and the question of exchange is raised in this connection also, but never, it would seem, with any satisfaction.

This Frontier Mail journey was comfortable enough, inasmuch as we had a berth each and could spread our bedding, but incredibly dusty, as a great deal of the way we ran through semi-desert. Processions of camels laden with timber moved along the roads across the wilderness, and cows and bullocks and buffalo and goats grazed off the sparse grass and scrubby bushes.

In India as in Russia people camp out on the railway stations with their bundles and bedding, squatting on the ground, or stretched out asleep. In Russia large kettles are part of the luggage; in India it is brass vessels. And as in Russia the beggars canvass the length of the train. Hawkers offer *pan*, nuts, fruits, soft drinks, newspapers, strings of flowers for the hair, and all manner of foodstuffs. The shrill cries of the hawkers combine to produce a quite indescribable din, and it is a din which is as incessant in the small hours of the morning as during the day—in striking contrast with the quietness of an English railway station in the early hours.

The variety of human beings on an Indian railway station is endlessly fascinating, and no matter how many journeys we did, or how tired we were, or how great the heat, we never tired of watching the

The Birla Temple, Delhi



strangeness and diversity. Women in faded ragged *saris*, but with arms covered with bangles and enormous bangles round the ankles; the crowd-effect of a moving mass of white, a sudden splash of colour from a *sari* or some unexpectedly elaborate male costume; tall handsome Sikhs with their beards neatly confined in nets, and wearing wonderful turbans with great flowing drifts of stiff muslin powdered with a kind of 'stardust'; a pot-bellied child wearing nothing but a sacred cord round his loins; a Sikh, naked but for a loin-cloth, taking his bath at a pump between the railway lines, his long hair pinned into a top-knot. He pours the water over himself from a brass vessel which he fills from the pump, and when he has done this a number of times he takes a roll of clean white cloth from where he has placed it beyond the reach of the water, holds one end in his teeth and lets the whole length fall down in front of him; from behind this he slips off the wet loin-cloth; then he takes the other end of the cloth and draws it up between his legs and winds the rest of it round his waist, and there he is all clean as to body and to *dhoti*, and decency in no way outraged—unless you are fussy and consider the fact that he was stark naked from behind improper. Wearing his clean *dhoti* he returns to the pump and washes out the one he has discarded, then holds it up to dry in the sun, which it does in a few minutes.

The powerful Indian sun makes life easier in many ways—and it is a powerful purifier. We were constantly assured that but for the sun there would be a great deal more disease than there is in India—the sun purifies and the vultures and crocodiles act as scavengers.

On all Indian railway stations of any size there are always two kinds of restaurant—'European style', and 'Hindu style'. There is also, usually, a Hindu water supply. And you have a choice of a toilet, European or Hindu style—that is to say you may squat or sit; either way there is usually no plumbing; it is a commode versus a hole.

We wakened on the Frontier Mail to *Vasant Panchami*, the first day of Spring, in celebration of which the womenfolk put on yellow *saris* and yellow bangles, and the men yellow turbans. "Because," says the young Hindu girl, "now the mustard is yellow, and everywhere is yellow with the bright sun. From now on the days will be warm and the people glad."

There are bright red *saris* as well as yellow, and fields blue with flax, and the vivid green of patches of cultivation in the grey wilderness. And huge carrion crows, and huger vultures, and storks, and monkeys in tree-tops and on railway outbuilding roofs.

We have been on the train all night and all the previous afternoon, and the second day on the train drags interminably. We cannot contend with the dust. I write in my diary, fretfully 'Between the noise, the jolting, the dust, the racket, it is impossible either to write or to concentrate. It is really horrible.' Later on I smile over this entry, for that was a de luxe journey, had we but realised it. . . .

The Taj Mahal, Agra

In the lower class people are so crowded that as the train progresses on its journey to get in it becomes necessary to climb in through the windows, and every coach has its hanger-on outside, on footboards, buffers, roofs. It is reminiscent of Russia. And post-war Germany. And as in Germany there have been ghastly accidents. There had recently been, when we were there, a collision in which seventeen people travelling on the footboard of a train were killed. The Government inserts advertisements in the papers warning people against the practice:

DO NOT TAKE UNNECESSARY RISKS!

Travelling on footboards, buffers, or carriage-roofs, is dangerous

REMEMBER—Your life is precious!

Inserted by the Public Relations Officer, Calcutta Railways,
in the interests of safe travel

Sometimes second-class passengers will admit these out-riders to their coach; usually they are quite bitterly hostile to them, when possible keeping them bolted out, and when they contrive to crowd in making it quite clear that their presence is unwelcome and resented.

On several occasions when at some point or other we had a coach to ourselves we would let people in. We were always being told by Indian friends that it was very foolish to do this, that we were liable to be robbed, but we never had any trouble with our guests; once it was a party of workmen travelling from one station to the next; (the distance between Indian stations is seldom, on main lines, less than two hours). On another occasion an old, old man in a white *dhoti* and turban, and carrying a staff, and looking for all the world like a shepherd from Biblical days; he squatted on the floor by the door. These out-riders usually drop off when the train slows down before entering a station, as they are ticketless.

But to return to the Frontier Mail. . . .

At one station a number of refugee children swarm out from a village to the train offering for sale baskets which they have made. They are eager, bright-eyed children, not in bad condition physically, on the whole, and generally clean. The Hindu girl buys a few baskets and talks with them and gives them oddments of food. At first they refuse the food, thinking, she says, it is scraps from plates, for that they will not take. But she assures them that it is untouched food, and then a brown forest of hands springs up.

"The refugees," she says, "like to work. They do not beg."

One of the children is fair-haired and blue-eyed.

"You get them, in the North," she says.

As we approach Delhi in the dusk of evening we see the fires outside refugee hutments all along the line.

Mr. Devadas Gandhi's secretary meets us with a car. He does not tell us where he is taking us, and when after driving some time through wide tree-lined streets we turn in at the gates of gardens in which there are white blocks of buildings we have no idea where we have been brought. Then over the central building we see the words 'Constitution House', but it means nothing, and we are too tired to ask. It is enough that we are no longer in the jolting racket and dust of the train. I am given a register to sign; there is a column in which I find I am required to state my purpose. I turn confusedly to the secretary.

"Put care of the Prime Minister," he says.

Later we discover that Constitution House is a Government Hostel and your stay there has to be sanctioned by an authority referred to as 'the Department'. Also the fact that you have once stayed there does not qualify you for return without further sanctioning.

Bearers appear and pick up our rucksacks and bedding, and we are escorted to a block some distance up the gardens. The buildings are single-storied and verandahed and built round three sides of a grassy compound with a flower-bed full of antirrhinums on the fourth side. The verandahs run continuously round all three sides and form a colonnade. There is a series of these three-sided blocks and compounds.

We step on to a verandah and a glass door is unlocked into a large bare white room with an immensely high ceiling. There are two bedsteads, a couple of chairs and a table and a cupboard. Two large lizards cling to the wall high up near a window just under the ceiling. This window is controlled by cords, and a mouse runs up and down a stretched cord on his lawful business. There is a huge windmill-like fan suspended low from the centre of the ceiling. Opening out of this room there is a dark stone-floored bathroom—without a bath, Indian-wise. There is a wash-basin and a shower, and in the wash-basin a shrimp-like creature which jumps, disconcertingly, when approached. There is a high cement wall round the shower, and a low wooden platform to stand on. Our dream of soaking in 'a nice hot bath' after the long and dusty journey is effectively disposed of. One of us strips for a shower—the other 'makes do' with the wash-basin, by kind permission of the shrimp. The water is tepid.

When we are approximately clean again we study the list of regulations on the wall and observe that Visitors' Servants are not allowed to sleep on the verandah, and that messing is compulsory. We return through the gardens to the main building for some compulsory messing. The dining-room is huge and the diners mostly Indian, though there are a few who look as though they might be English, and there is a table with a party of American officers in uniform. I have the sudden feeling of being back in a press-camp in the American zone of Germany. . . .

I meet an Indian journalist whom I knew in London, and learn that most of the visitors are newspaper people or conference delegates, and that the Americans are 'military observers' for the U.N.O. conference. They do some observing during dinner and next day we find ourselves with them in a very handsome car, because we have somehow agreed to go to a circus with them.

"You folks care to come along to the circus with us?"

The invitation caught us in low spirits, because our mail was somewhere in Delhi, mid-way between the office of the *Hindustan Times* and Constitution House—the *Hindustan Times* had redirected it to Constitution House, Mr. Devadas Gandhi having arranged for us to stay there, and Constitution House had redirected it back to the newspaper office because we had not arrived there 'on schedule', and it was not at either place. In the mail would be a letter with our jungle instructions, and we were tied until we had it. We had been planning to allay our restlessness by walking the several miles out of the cantonment and into Old Delhi. But here were two Americans with a high-powered car, and apparently as much at a loose end as ourselves.

So there we were being wafted off to the circus with them, a major, and a second-lieutenant.

I give them a cutting from *The Times of India* about our arrival in Bombay to explain us to them, and ask if we might know their names.

The major says to call him 'Bud'. The 'Lootenant', he says, is 'Bill'. Bill is blacked-out behind dark glasses and sits with the driver. We sit sedately either side the Major who has long-lashed blue eyes and an engaging smile, but we are a little shy, because we have never had a gentleman-friend called Bud before, and anyhow, being English, we don't feel we know him nearly well enough for any kind of a first-name. . . .

We drive out through the wide wooded streets of the cantonment, past handsome palatial houses, quite the most handsome and palatial of which is the Soviet Embassy, with white pillars and a bougainvillea-covered porch, and stately cypresses, and out to the edge of the old town. The circus is in a ramshackle-looking tent on a wide piece of waste-ground where booths have also been erected.

Inside the circus tent we are segregated from the masses because the major has bought the most expensive seats. These are a couple of very old sofas from which the horse-hair stuffing is escaping. The other seats are merely planks. There are numerous yellow turbans and *saris* in the audience. The band, which seems mostly cymbals, drum, fife, thinly plugs one little tumty-tum European tune.

The audience laughs at precisely the same things that an English circus laughs at—the simplest clowning raises the biggest laugh. Buffoonery is international. Some of this is pretty coarse, but the crowd seems to enjoy it.

The audience, in its diversity and colourfulness, is on the whole more interesting than the performance. Rows and rows of bright dark eyes in brown faces, many of them very beautiful, are raised to the rickety tent roof when acrobats, in grimy long pants in lieu of tights, shin up ropes and swing to and fro in a trapese act. The expressions on the faces of the children are wonderful. Many of the children have their eyes rimmed round, with mascara, a custom which seems to be common all over India, and which is responsible for a good deal of eye-trouble, but no amount of protest from medical and welfare workers dissuades the mothers from the practice.

A little Chinese girl picks up coins from a table with her mouth, balancing her small body on the table in some extraordinary contortionist manner. Before beginning her performance she gives a curious 'old-fashioned look' at the four whites on the broken sofas. We cannot determine whether the look is disdain or merely curiosity, but we applaud her turn vigorously to show her that, for our part, we are anyhow friendly aliens.

"She's got her eye on us, I guess!" the major murmurs. He discloses that he and Bill have been several times to the circus from sheer boredom; their job in Delhi is finished, and they are waiting to be posted to Kashmir. That they might explore Delhi and its environs does not seem to have occurred to them. They have not heard of Muttra, with its ancient temples, which is only a few hours away, and they have seen the Taj Mahal only from the air. They are so bored that when they don't go to the circus they lie on their beds and sleep in the afternoons. But now they watch this third-rate show as though it were good, and as though they were seeing it for the first time—which anyhow indicates staying-power.

An elephant enters to the tune of *The Minstrel Boy*, which later changes to *Lakes, Killarney*. There are some remarkable Chinese jugglers. One of them does a balancing act on wheels on a glass table. Meanwhile the clown scampers about exclaiming in English the words used by Egyptian brothel touts, 'very good, very sweet, very clean'. A fat white woman—Russian, say the Americans, knowledgeably—whose flabby white flesh bulges over tight black corsets and high-heeled shoes, and whose grey-white thighs are immense, does a Spanish dance which goes completely unapplauded. There is very little applause for anything, but plenty of laughter for the rough-and-tumble stuff. A one-eyed tiger is led in on a chain and balances on blocks of wood, as the elephant had done previously. A motor-cyclist does a jump. Every now and then the sun comes blindingly through a gap in the tent roof.

Before returning to Constitution House we have the Americans drive us round the old town, which interests us so much we decide we must come back alone and walk in it. Bud and Bill have no comment to offer on Old Delhi, except that it is 'pretty dirty'. On the steps of the Shah Jehan mosque I make the mistake of giving a coin to a beggar and we are immediately the centre of a waving forest of out-thrust arms and hands. We extricate ourselves from the mob only when a policeman appears on the scene and waving his *lathi* forces a passage back to the car for us.

With the Americans we also visited the Birla Temple; to both these places we returned later on our own. It seemed to us that both demanded more time than, we felt, Bud and Bill were prepared to give to them. To them we were indebted for a glimpse of the Delhi night-life, which was clearly more up their street than mosques and temples.

This took place in a badly-lit dining-room in a huge hotel. Because there was dancing and cabaret an entrance fee was charged for admission to the dining-room. Tables were grouped round a small dance-floor. There were great open spaces of empty tables, and the atmosphere was oppressive. Indians in dinner-jackets, foxtrotted stiffly and awkwardly with ladies in *saris*. There were some Indian army officers, and a party of Americans. Not all the Indians danced; more looked on than danced. No one was drinking though drink was available. Later we had a round of liquers which cost more than the entire meal. Bud and Bill tucked into beefsteaks, because, they said, they were so tired of 'the eternal mutton' of Constitution House. Mutton for breakfast, they said, mutton for lunch, mutton for dinner. We suggested that it was not strictly necessary to have meat of any kind for breakfast, to which Bud replied that you'd gotta keep going somehow. . . .

They had come to Delhi by 'plane from Italy and brought a case of whisky with them. When I inquired what they would do when the case was finished they replied that they'd 'taken care of that', reinforcements would reach them by 'plane; it was all 'laid on'. It was all part of the essential business of keeping going.

But keeping going under the strain of New Delhi night-life was not so easy. There was a point at which the lights were lowered and a plump female in evening dress, who might have been Anglo-Indian, who might have been anything, crooned into a microphone. Our faces began to ache with boredom.

Even the Americans felt the inner despair.

"Let's go," they said. We went—gladly.

"Is that all there is to the night-life of New Delhi?" I enquired, as we came out.

"Oh, there are other places," they said. "But this one's reckoned the best. . . ."

New Delhi is a creation of the British. It was largely designed by Lutyens, and the declared British aim was 'to set our seal of conquest permanently on India by erection of examples of the best of British art'. For this reason these examples are generally disliked by the Indians, who, not unreasonably, regard New Delhi as imperialism in stone. In a little book on *Historical Monuments in Delhi and their Cultural Significance*[1] Mr. Devi Dayal Mathur, of the Archaeological Department, observes that 'raised in this spirit how far they can lay claim to art, which transcends political domination and racial prejudice, it is for the reader to judge'.

He goes on to describe the Assembly Chamber, which is reminiscent of the Albert Hall, with a kind of Wren spire oddly sunk in the middle of the dome, as 'this ridiculous pseudo-Grecian building'. Of the two blocks of the Imperial Secretariat Building built opposite each other, either side a broad flight of stairs and terraces, he says they 'may easily be mistaken for a pair of barracks or hostels. . . . The crowning absurdity are the rectangular columns on the roofs at the east end. They look like masts and as the flags are flown on them the bloated resemblance of the buildings with tramp steamers becomes almost complete'. Of the 'Indian Gate', a kind of Marble Arch at one end of a great open space of grass flanked by trees and traversed by a motor road, he says contemptuously, 'Perhaps no gate anywhere is so nondescript as this', and continues:

'The Greek Byzantine, Gothic, Turkish, Muslim, Persian, Buddhist, and Hindu elements have been combined at random to produce "the Best of British Art". Thus it is evident that this British Art (of New Delhi) whatever the term may connote is of mixed origin and does not do credit to any great style of architecture.'

It is no doubt just criticism, and no Indian can reasonably be expected to like the British creation of New Delhi as the capital of their country; nevertheless, the general effect of New Delhi is pleasing to the impartial eye. White buildings with cool classical colonnades sweep in semi-circles round public gardens, and even the mongrel architecture of the administrative buildings, an acropolis above the broad plain of grass sweeping up to it, has an impressiveness and dignity, despite its architectural absurdities.

But New Delhi, one is constantly told, by English people, and sometimes by Indians themselves, is 'not what it was', for now refugees camp out under the trees in the broad streets, pitching their derelict tents and rough shelters by the garden walls of stately villas. Under the trees, too, they set up their booths, selling sweets, nuts, fruits; they hang old bicycle tyres from the lower branches of the trees, and you can have a puncture mended whilst you wait—or squat under a tree and have a hair-cut or shave.

There are still beautiful villa gardens blazing with brilliant flowers, and orange and crimson and purple blossoms crowding over the walls. Coming from the humidity of Bombay to Delhi is, climatically, like returning to England. In Bombay in January we sweltered; in Delhi it was pleasantly cool, there had been a shower of rain, and the sky was heavy with grey clouds. In the hot weather, however, the heat is extreme, and in the winter the cold can be severe.

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[1] Published by Messrs. Vaughan and Co., Government Booksellers and Publishers Delhi, 1947.

Old Delhi is the usual teeming swarming labyrinth of streets in which homeless cows wander nosing among the garbage for something to eat, and the gutters running with water are used by men and children as latrines. Occasionally a man will be seen leaning from the window of a house and cleaning his teeth over the gutter as over a wash-basin. The alleyways are covered with the dung of wandering cows, donkeys laden with panniers, bullocks harnessed to carts. There is the ammoniac smell of urine and the rotting smell of garbage, and the greasy smell of frying foodstuffs mingling with the incense smell of joss-sticks. Flies swarm everywhere. It is dirty all right. But it is 'India', which New Delhi is not, and it abounds in historical and architectural interest.

The broad steps leading up to the Shah Jehan mosque are filthy with sputum, excrement, nut-shells, bits of dirty rag, and are a camping ground of beggars and refugees. The flies buzz in black swarms over the filth. Fortunately it is not required of the visitor to the mosque to remove footwear until reaching the massive East Gate. The prayer-hall is an enormous courtyard exposed to the sky. It is more impressive from outside than from within, and photographically impossible because of the iron posts and struts and the wires which support the awnings over the courtyard in hot weather. From outside the striped cupolas and the very tall sandstone and marble striped minarets are impressive.

The guide who insisted on attaching himself to us declared this mosque to be the largest in India, but this claim is made for various mosques throughout India, we discovered later. We were taken to an alcove where the Keeper of the Relics produced a red whisker in a case which he said was from the beard of the Prophet. He also produced a footprint in a slab of marble which is claimed as a miraculous footprint of the Prophet, and there were also manuscripts attributed to him. When we had gazed at all these with a polite but sceptic interest the Keeper of the Relics declared:

"Now you must pay something!"

When, startled, since we had not asked to be shown these things, we enquired how much, we were given the curious answer:

"What you like—five rupees, ten rupees."

A rupee being the equivalent of one shilling and six pence we considered one to be enough—a fact which the Keeper of the Relics, a bearded young man in very white clothing, hotly disputed. Before we got out of the mosque there was a similar argument with the guide, who considered one rupee not enough for his unasked services, but we had learned one very useful word of Hindustani:

"*Bas, bas*" ("Enough, enough!"), we said impatiently, and waved him away.

This exploitation of the visitor is not confined to Moslems in relation to European visitors; in a mosque in Benares the mullah hung *lehs* round our necks and then demanded five rupees of the two young Indians who accompanied us. We handed the *lehs* back to him. Nor is the racket confined to Moslems; when visiting a Hindu temple there is invariably a point at which a flower is thrust into one's hand, with a demand for 'eight annas'. And Hindus themselves must 'tip' the temple boy who brings them the holy ash and the red powder with which they smear their foreheads in token of their devotion.

The Lakshmi Narayan Mundiar, generally known as the Birlar Temple, after the pious Indian industrialist who had it built, is in New Delhi. It was built at a time when 'untouchables' were refused entry to most temples, and was intended as a place of worship to which they might freely come. Architecturally it is quite fantastically vulgar. It was completed as recently as 1938. It has the general design of the ancient temples, and is carried out mainly in pink sandstone, with a good deal of white about it. Of this combination of ancient tradition and modernisation the severe Mr. Devi Dayal Mathur says only that the result is 'not quite happy'. He considers that it lacks 'spiritual force', and that 'the vital weaknesses of the Birla Temple are its absence of a religious atmosphere and the constructional defect which secures a uniform diffused light everywhere instead of a contrast of light and shade'. Though he is driven to admit that 'the introduction of large size mirrors in the shrines of the temple . . . is a shocking vulgarity which can at once be avoided'.

The temple stands in gardens abounding in lily-ponds and in life-sized statues, mounted on pedestals, of elephants and huge hooded snakes, and of Maharajas and other eminent Hindu personalities of Delhi's past. There are also in the gardens artificial caves whose entrances are the open mouths of dragons. According to Mr. Mathur they are 'meant to indicate how the ancient ascetics lived in seclusion'. What they in fact suggest is a kind of fun-fair for children—an effect heightened by the adjacent children's playground equipped with a sand-pit, and chutes down which children slide with shrieks of delight. And whilst the temple bells ring in a pleasant confusion a radio in another part of the pleasure-garden relays the evening's news. . . .

Not far from this fantastic place there is a small Buddhist temple also built by Birla, and of this Mr. Mathur most truly says, 'in this there is evidence of much more refinement than in the Hindu temple'.

"When you come to write the book," said Reginald, severely, "I trust you will suppress the fact that you indulged in the tourist vulgarity of visiting the Taj Mahal!"

Tut-tut! There's intellectual snobbery for you!

Let it be recorded that not merely did we visit Agra, a four-hour train journey from Delhi, in a crowded train, and then a two-mile drive in a jolting *tonga* along a very dusty road out to the Taj, but when we got there we 'gloried and drank deep' of that white wonder which afflicted Mr. Huxley 'with a sense of discomfort'. He saw it by the light of a very fine sunset, and Nature, he records, 'did its best for Taj', but 'even at sunset, even reverberated upside down in tanks and river, even in conjunction with melancholy cypresses—the Taj was a disappointment'.

Mr. Huxley, it seems, could not overcome his consciousness of the 'inordinate costliness' of this elaborate tomb, generally considered the most beautiful in the world, which the Shah Jehan built for his wife in the 17th century, and in which he also is buried. Mr. Huxley dislikes the costly and the 'picturesque' in architecture, and the costliness of the Taj is fabulous, but is 'picturesque' the *mot juste* for this Mogul splendour of dazzlingly white marble domes and arches and minarets, enthroned upon a great white marble terrace overlooking and reflected in a long cypress-flanked pool?

Mr. Huxley considers the 'four thin tapering towers' of the Minarets 'among the ugliest structures ever created by human hands'. He concedes that 'the Taj itself is marred by none of the faults which characterise the minarets. But its elegance is at the best of a very dry and negative kind. Its "classicism" is the product not of intellectual restraint imposed on an exuberant fancy, but of an actual deficiency of fancy, a poverty of imagination'.

Mr. Huxley, in short, refused to be impressed.

But it is simpler, as well as vastly pleasanter, to dispense with these intellectual resistances and give yourself up to the dream-like, the incredible beauty. Despite its massiveness it is ethereal; it seems to float against the sky[1]; it has the substance of a dream. It is white marble all but blazing in the brilliancy of its whiteness against the deep blue of the sky. Yet there is softness in that brilliancy, in that density of whiteness inlaid with precious stones in exquisite and intricate filigree; the whole dream-like substance could melt away into the sky.

One is always recommended to see the Taj Mahal by moonlight. It must be incredible by moonlight. But it is incredible in sunlight.

To enter the mausoleum itself you must remove your shoes and leave them at the door. The marble is hot under your feet. The tombs of the Shah and his Queen lie side by side under the great cupola. They are thickly inlaid with precious stones in the patterns of flowers and leaves, exquisitely wrought. Flowers and coins are laid upon the tombs, and the Keeper of the Tombs when he has drawn your attention to this and that presents you with a flower, gives you his priestly blessing—and collects from you . . . which is artistically and religiously a pity.

[1] After writing that I discovered that Sir Malcolm Lyall Darling, in his book, *At Freedom's Door*, writing of the Taj also had that sense of all that white wonder of solid marble 'floating'. He writes, 'When a man is well over sixty, it takes a good deal to make him catch his breath, but that is what happened when I suddenly saw it through the great entrance gate floating in the light of a large moon rising above the trees.'

The 'obvious' picture of the Taj is the familiar one taken straight on from the great arc of the mosque at the entrance to the gardens, looking up the cypress-flanked 'tank'—as any artificial pond in India is always called—and showing its reflection in the water. It makes a very beautiful picture, and is the best 'view' of the complete structure, but we walked all round it trying to find if possible a less hackneyed angle—though it has, of course, been photographed from every possible angle. What is so exciting about the Taj is that with every fresh glimpse of it, between cypresses, through pine trees, across rose gardens, there is the renewed wonder, the fresh impact of its beauty.

Mr. Huxley, incidentally, refers to the Taj as one of the Seven Wonders of the World—which demonstrates that though he is incapable of sharing a popular aesthetic taste he is not incapable of sharing a popular fallacy.

There is more to see in the vicinity of Agra than the Taj Mahal; there is the intact but deserted four-hundred year old city of Fatepur Sikri, which Mr. Huxley was able to bring himself to admire, although it is commonly admired—perhaps because it is sandstone instead of marble. We had been urged not to miss this, but we had been similarly urged not to miss so many things, and there was heavily upon us the feeling that it was impossible to take in everything. Better, we felt, to see fewer things and more deeply assimilate whatever beauty and interest they had to offer.

And there were two things I had wanted to see ever since I was about fifteen, and they were both in India—one was the Khyber Pass, and the other was the Taj Mahal.

We left Agra without having seen the Taj by moonlight, and without having seen Fatepur Sikri at all, but we had seen a beauty as of something 'in a vision or a dream', more beautiful than the turquoise and lapis-lazuli domes of Samarkand; a splendour of beauty King Solomon himself might have dreamed in a dream of the Queen of Sheba. How fair must that empress have been for whom that dream of white marble in a garden of cypresses was conceived, and how greatly beloved! She was the *Taj Mahal*—the Crown of the Palace, 'fairest and most lovable of Indian women'; the desire to dedicate to her memory a monument 'as fair and lovely as herself' has produced what many distinguished authorities consider the supreme achievement of Mohammedan art, the finest example of Mogul architecture in the world.

What it cost in *money* is of completely no interest, since beauty has no price. Its real cost was the misery of the slaves who built it. But in terms of money the Taj Mahal is in the true and literal sense priceless, and its beauty is not to be diminished by popular acclaim.

Part II

TIGER, TIGER

widen considerably and the whole structure finally split and crumble, and the caste system, already weakening, with it.

In charge of the ladies waiting-room at Moradabad was a woman in a dirty white *sari* who lay sleeping on the bare boards of the floor. She wore silver bangles on each wrist, and had the usual long beautiful hands with double-jointed fingers. She wakened when we entered and sat up on the floor and talked to us, though we had no idea what she said. Despite her unkempt hair and general dirtiness she was beautiful, and when she got up there was great grace in her movements.

At Bareilly, also, the attendant lay sleeping on the floor, but she did not waken. She had a tiny baby lying drawn close into her body; both were very dirty, and the smell was so fierce that I left my bedding where I had spread it and went out and wandered about on the platform among the prostrate bodies. All Russia came back to me—the East, with its incredible poverty and squalor, its endless diversity of humanity, and therefore its endless interest.

We shared a dirty dingy compartment from Bareilly with a sedate elderly European-style Indian gentleman who retired modestly to the toilet to remove his trousers, and then came back and sat about on his berth in long woollen pants clasped round the calves with suspenders. We spread our bedding above and beside him, nonchalantly, like ladies perfectly accustomed to sharing compartments with strange gentlemen in their underwear. . . .

In the morning large monkeys came alongside the train begging like children.

The European-style gentleman removed his trousers from under his pillow and padded into the toilet to put them on. When he returned he watched our interest in the monkeys with benign amusement.

"You'll see plenty more of those," he observed, and those were the first and last words he spoke to us.

The outer foothills of the Himalaya became visible as we approached Haldwani, and, excitingly, distant snow-covered peaks. There were forest-clad hills in the near distance, and close to the railway line a wasteland confusion of bamboo, and small thin trees swarming with monkeys, and dense undergrowth. There was the feeling of the jungle drawing near.

At the station before Haldwani a forest officer found us on the train and told us that Mr. Chaturvedi was waiting for us up the line. Our hearts quickened. The jungle was now very near.

The train puffed up a steep gradient beside a wide river-bed full of boulders and stones, and a great activity of men and horses and mules carting the stones, and before we had sufficiently collected our thoughts for the immediacy of arrival we were there, and the jungle was there, represented in the burly person of the Chief Conservator of Forests, looking very much the *shikari* with his rifle, his leather jacket, his beret. Turbaned forest orderlies took our rucksacks and bedding and balanced them on their heads, and we battled our way out of the surging yelling confusion of the station to the waiting car.

There had been heavy rains the night before and the water was too deep at the ford for motor traffic to go through. We had therefore to walk three miles through the forest at Kathgodam, crossing the river by a foot-bridge, and pick up a car waiting on the other side. Our baggage was taken across in advance by the orderlies whilst we breakfasted at the forest rest-house at Haldwani.

Kathgodam is a ramshackle little town at the foot of the high hills where, six thousand feet up, straggles the beautiful hill-station of Naini Tal—which later we visited—piled up above a lake. There is a large resin and timber depot beside the river-bed, at the other side of which rise steep and thickly-wooded hills. We crossed an aqueduct and followed a path up through these woods, our host ahead of us with his gun, some distance behind us two orderlies carrying our coats and the typewriter. We could quite well have carried these things ourselves, but in India only the poor bear their own burdens. Then again, if coats and typewriter had to be carried for us, one orderly could have carried the lot, but is the Chief Conservator of Forests to march through his forests with two guests and only one orderly in his retinue? The orderlies would have been there whether they had anything to carry or not. The chief function of an orderly, we discovered later, is to be *there*.

At the top of the forest path some almost naked children stood watching us. Behind them were their homes—grass huts set among banana trees and palms. The children were pot-bellied and spindle-legged, but lively. The car and the two white females seemed to fascinate them about equally.

The car bounced and bounded along the rough narrow track. We stopped twice—once a short distance along, beside a pool at the side of the road, to watch the movements of a large green snake which finally disappeared into the water, and later when we crossed a narrow sandy stretch of river-bed.

We stopped then because the quick and always searching eyes of the Chief Conservator and his driver had seen animal footprints in the sand. They were the pug-marks of a tiger.

They seemed very large to us, and disconcertingly fresh.

We looked at each other a little fearfully, but wholly excited, and the same thought, we knew, was in both our minds: *this is it*. Only we hadn't expected it quite so soon.

The two men got out of the car and walked about following the footprints with a quick, eager excitement. They smiled, their eyes flashed, long brown fingers pointed. They bent close to the ground and were themselves like animals sniffing a scent.

When they returned to the car our host said, laughing, but manifestly excited:

"We live on tiger footprints here!"

He went on to tell us: a few days ago a tiger had killed a man who had been cutting grass. It was thought that probably the man had surprised the tiger sleeping in the deep grass—which is higher than a man—for it was mid-day. Now the people were nervous about going out and cutting grass or working in the forests. He had been able to persuade them the incident was an accident, but the tiger must be killed. A tiger who has killed one human being is very liable to kill others, not, as is commonly supposed, because he acquires a taste for human flesh, but because there is always a reason for his man-eating—the most common being some disability which makes it impossible for him to hunt fast-moving animals such as deer, successfully; a wounded tiger, for example, invariably becomes a man-eater. There was a wounded tiger in this district, wounded by our host at Christmas, but the tiger who had killed the man would not be that one, he said, because that tiger was in another district and kept to his own particular 'beat'. He was not likely to range so far afield as this. He had no doubt that the pug-marks in the river-bed were those of the tiger which had killed the man.

We returned his eager smile a little palely. The jungle, we felt, was rushing us. It might have waited till we had at least had a wash after our journey before it started producing its tiger footprints, and of a man-killer at that.

The track ran past a dense teak plantation—"Very good cover for tigers," said our host—and then through deep forests of tall *sal* trees, some over 150 feet high, and as much as nine and twelve feet in girth. What at first appeared to be stumps of felled trees proved to be abandoned white-ant hills, many of them five feet high and more. They are composed of mud, and so brittle that pieces can be broken off in the fingers. At one part of the forest women in *saris* were clearing the undergrowth, hacking at it with sickles; a forest guard, in the semi-military uniform and blue turban of the service, stood in charge of them. He had a long stick and continually goaded them. I asked what it was he so continuously shouted to them as he stood over them, and was told, "Get a move on there! Hurry up! Get a move on!" Without his nagging presence we were assured they would not work. . . .

In some open land behind the deep blocks of forest we came to a two-storied house and some huts. Two large elephants were staked in the compound. The car slowed down and men and boys came running. One was a tall young man in a broad-brimmed felt hat—the local forester.[1] They were obviously excited. The word *machan* occurred several times. Our host nodded and smiled, his eyes flashing.

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[1] The hierarchy of the Indian forest service has the Chief Conservator of Forests of the province at the top, and the Forest-Guard at the bottom, above him come the Foresters, Rangers, Divisional Forest-Officers, Conservators.

I remarked, casually, as we drove off, plunging into the deep dark sal blocks again:

"They're excited, aren't they?"

He smiled, dreamily, contentedly.

"Yes, they're excited."

"Is it the man-eater?"

"No, another tiger. . . . A man has reported one of his buffaloes killed."

He brooded, happily.

II

CHURGALLIA; THE 'FORESTS OF THE NIGHT'

WE passed grass huts at the side of the track, some of them—it could be seen through the open doors—housing cattle as well as humans, the cattle partitioned off by grass screens. The people were very thin, and in rags, some of the men rather more than half-naked. Near the gates of the forest rest-house compound a larger grass hut displayed brass vessels on a trestle table outside, and on the ground there were also rough benches. It was a café. Not far from it another hut was a combined shop and café. These few huts and the rest-house comprise Churgallia—which means crossroads of the forest. Later we were told that 'Chur' also means thieves as well as four, so that it could be also the place of thieves.

It is sufficient to describe one forest rest-house—to describe all, including Dak bungalows. There is a main room, used as a living-room, with smaller rooms used as bedrooms opening out. Each bedroom has its own toilet, with commodes, a washing place bricked round so that the water you throw over yourself from buckets does not run all over the floor but flows out through a hole into a gulley in the compound; there is also a jug and basin, and a towel-rack; and there are cockroaches. A door into the compound is the sweeper's entrance. The rooms are very high-ceilinged to afford the maximum coolness, and in addition to windows on the ground floor level there are small windows high up under the ceiling and controlled by cords.

Away from towns and electricity *punkahs* replace fans. This is usually a piece of deeply fringed cloth on a frame which may be swung to and fro by means of cords manipulated by the *punkah wallah* who sits outside on the verandah. The *punkah wallah* may sit for hours in the service of keeping the sahibs and memsahibs cool.

There is always a verandah, very often arched, giving a cloistral effect, and sometimes compassing all four walls of the house, and there is always some protection over doors and windows against mosquitoes—wire gauze over the windows, very often, and a rush blind over doorways when it is too hot to close the doors. The kitchen is usually some distance away from the house, though very often the cooking will be done on a verandah at the back of the house over a charcoal brazier. Across the compound are the servants' quarters of wooden or brick-built huts, or even tents.

You cannot, in India, have just a 'servant'. The cook-general is unknown. Four servants (all men) seem to be the usual number in what are approximately 'middle-class' homes—there has to be a cook, a table-boy, a cleaner (who is sometimes a woman though more often

Forest Rest-House, Churgallia, United Provinces jungles

a man) and a sweeper; if there is a garden there will be one or more gardeners—usually more; if there is a car there will be a chauffeur: and there is usually a washer-man, a *dhobi*, attached to the house. If there are children there has also to be an *ayah*, a female nurse. The cook will not wash dishes, and the table-boy will not do cleaning—though he will sometimes make beds; and no one but an untouchable will do the sweeper's work in lavatories and bathrooms. The division of labour in India is such that one man will drive the shovel into what has to be shovelled and another man will pull it out on a string. . . .

At the forest rest-houses in addition to the table-boy, cook, chauffeur, who travelled round with us, there were also the camp orderlies and sweepers and hangers-on. Wages are everywhere low in India, A cook will average 30 rupees a month with food; a table-boy 40 rupees a month without food . . . which is more than school-teachers get. The people cutting grass in the jungles and clearing the undergrowth in the forests can make 'as much as'—in the words of the forest-ranger who told us—two rupees a day (which, he said, was sufficient for their needs).

The Churgallia forest rest-house is white-washed and stands in a grassy compound. A great gold mohur tree, with fern-like leaves, spreads its branches across the front of the house and affords a pleasant shade in the heat of the day. About March the tree is covered with red-gold blossoms which when they fall spread a cloth of gold on the ground.

In the late afternoon of the first day at Churgallia our host got up abruptly from the tea-table, with the single word, "Come!"

We followed him out of the bungalow and into the compound where the driver waited beside the car—and the inevitable hovering orderly. Inside the car was a double-barrelled and a single-bore rifle. Our host offered no explanation and we did not ask any questions. We became, in India, very given to accepting any and every situation without comment or question. Indians are not in any case much given to explanation.

We drove through the *sal* forests. Forest workers stepped aside and salaamed deeply, the palms of their hands pressed together, finger-tips touching, as the car containing the Great Man hurtled past. We turned in at the gate of the elephant-station and with quickening hearts observed that one elephant had been saddled. The elephant was led forwards as we stepped out of the car and at a word from the *mahaout* —a barefoot little man in tight-fitting white trousers—the great beast knelt. The chauffeur fetched some small steps from the back of the car, but the *mahaout* said something quickly to our host, who then waved the steps away. To us, he said:

"My *mahout* says you must learn to climb an elephant. Watch me."

It was quite simple, we observed. An orderly holds the elephant's

"*A* shikar *elephant called Lightning*" tail across the beast's rump, to form a step, one places one foot on a foot of the elephant, and the other on the tail, and then pulls oneself up on to the *katolah*, as the saddle is called. The *katolah* is not to be confused with the *howdah*, the elaborate box-like affairs on elephant-back into which maharajahs mount, with the aid of a pair of steps at the side of the elephant. The *katolah* is like a table placed on the back of the elephant upside down, with a thin mattress spread over the flat of it. The 'legs' serve as pegs to hold on to.

Climbing an elephant, we discovered, presented no difficulties, though the really smart way of mounting the beast, we learned later, is to stand on the tip of the trunk, get a grip on the great ears, and allow yourself to be hoisted up. But for beginners we thought that a little too ambitious. The forest-ranger climbed up after us and sat at the back of the *katolah* with a gun across his knees. Our host sat in front with the double-barrelled rifle. The guns were loaded and we were given spare cartridges to hold. The elephant rose with an earthquake motion and we left the compound and followed a track which ran for a time through dark forest and then came out into a sunlit open space of deep brown grass.

So silently an elephant walks, with a soft fluff-fluff of the great feet. Fluff-fluff through the deep white dust of the track, then swish-swish into the deep sea of brown grass, long-drawn swishes as we move slowly forward, the grass reaching up to our feet, resting on the narrow board on the elephant's flanks, and sometimes reaching up to our knees, till we seem like to drown in the brown sea. But in spite of the mighty movement of the great beast no wake is left; the tall grass closes in again leaving no trace.

Beautiful it is out there in the wide open space, with the mellow evening sunlight turning the brown grass to a luminous gold. The air is so warm and still, and the great foothills of the Himalaya, range upon blue range, are mysterious and dim against the paling sky. A water-bird calls and calls along the river-bed with a bubbling sound like water escaping from the neck of a bottle. There is no other sound but the soft swish of the tinder-dry grass.

We head for the river-bed, which means descending a steep bank. When an elephant descends you all but pitch over the beast's head. She—females are always used—goes down very gingerly, dragging first one huge leg out behind her and then the other, and planting her forefeet closely. When she comes up the other side you cling on in a desperate attempt not to fall back over her tail; the sensation is of a table on which you are seated being tilted sharply down and then as sharply up, and under the table there is a convulsive movement which makes clinging on doubly difficult. After one ride on an elephant Mr. Huxley records his immense admiration for Hannibal. . . .

But we descend safely into the river-bed without being pitched on to our heads, and the elephant picks her way delicately between the huge stones and boulders. Whenever we come to a patch of sand we all peer down, looking for pug-marks. We find them, and there is much excited whispering. We follow the footprints across the river-bed and up the opposite bank and plunge about for a while in dense undergrowth; here the tiger has been, and here he still may be. Here, perhaps, he has lain up all the hot afternoon, for here is 'good cover for tiger'. . . . Then suddenly a sambur barks from across the other side of the river. Everyone on the elephant becomes tense with listening, for the bark of the sambur—which is an Indian elk—is a warning of the tiger moving about.

We plunge back through the undergrowth, some of it swamp, into which the elephant sinks to her knees, tilt head foremost down the river bank, wade through pools, pick a way between boulders and huge stones, turn back to the bank, but lower down, in the direction of the sambur call. The light is fading now, and it is growing cold. There are a few pale stars. The mountains are only shadows now, and the sunset no more than a fading smear of gold. The moon is rising.

Suddenly there comes the tiger's call, a deep, hollow, up-from-the-belly *ah-humm*, *ah-humm* . . . and it is close at hand; we are still in the river-bed, under the low cliff of the bank, and the tiger is hidden from us by the deep grass at the top. We strain our eyes in the fading light, but we cannot see him. Our hearts are beating very fast, and our teeth would undoubtedly chatter if we let them. We all stay silent and motionless on the elephant, and the elephant, too, is tense. All the warmth has gone out of the sky and a coldness comes up from the earth. It is no longer a warm golden mellow world, full of peace and gentleness. It is cold and grey and full of menace. The water-bird calls again, and calls and calls, in long urgent whistles, and there is a sudden frightened chattering of monkeys in the tree-tops. The tiger is on the move and the whole jungle is aware of it.

Our host leans forward and touches the *mahaout* very lightly on the shoulder, and makes a forward motion with his hand. The *mahaout* digs his bare toes into the backs of the elephant ears and makes an urgent hurrying movement with his body, urging the elephant on. We climb up the bank into the long grass at a place where there is a very narrow track, no more than a cow-path. We press forward through the grass, but now the jungle is silent, not a movement, not a sound. The tiger has been there, and the monkeys and the sambur have seen him, but noiselessly as he came he has gone. So delicately he moves that he can step on dry leaves without a sound.

We press through the deep grass, but there is no sound, no movement. Every now and then we stop and listen. At a sign from his sahib the *mahaout* cups his mouth in his hands, throws back his head, and gives out an ear-splitting and very passable imitation of a tiger. It is horribly eerie in the stillness and the dusk. But there comes no answering cry—to the intense relief of two of the party—and we press on through the grass.

It does not feel so safe in the deep grass as out in the open of the river-bed. With the grass reaching up to it the *katolah* does not seem so high above the ground . . . though a tiger can leap fifteen feet anyhow. It is not the encounter with the tiger we are afraid of, but what may happen when the shooting begins. A wounded tiger followed up and cornered will charge. Tigers have been known to leap on to the heads of elephants, and frightened elephants are commonly known to bolt. Our host has assured us that his *mahaout* has 'no regard for his own life and very little for mine', and that he himself has 'completely no feeling for danger' in this tiger business, because, he declares, if a tiger should get him in the end then he would become 'a part of those beautiful stripes', and Brahmin though he is he would prefer it to being cremated and his ashes thrown in the Ganges. . . .

We, however, cannot share this romantic and heroic point of view. Our great desire now is that the sambur will not call again, so that we can head back to the elephant-station. It is some time, however, before the search is abandoned, and the moon is high in the sky before we see the lights of the forester's house, and the fires outside the grass-huts. The forest people make their fires of long branches of trees, and squat on the ground beside the fire, or stretch out in sleep, quite without protection in this tiger-infested district. For the popular notion that a fire is protection is fallacious and disproved by the facts. It has even been known to attract the larger carnivora.[1]

There was a great gathering of men and boys squatting beside the fires at the elephant-station that night, as the next day was a fair-day and these people had come in from the hills, with chillis for the market in the town some miles away. We fed the elephant with huge *chapatis*

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[1] Brigadier-General R. G. Burton, in his *The Book of the Tiger* (Hutchinson, 1933) writes: 'The idea that fires lighted round camp will keep off wild beasts is still prevalent, like the widely-held supposition, on which it is based, that the great carnivora are given to attacking man at sight. There can be no doubt that the erroneous idea of the protection supposed to be afforded by fire or light arose from the fact that travellers generally ascribed their immunity from attack to the camp fire.' He goes on to recount incidents in which wild beasts have carried off people in spite of fires having been lit. He quotes Major Shakespear in his *Wild Sports of India* as recording that one of his troopers was carried off by a man-eating tigeress from beside the camp fire when actually being posted as a sentry. He cites, among other cases, the incident in which a servant of a forest-officer was carried off by a tiger in Lower Burma when entering a tent, 'in spite of many camp fires', adding that 'Similar stories come from Africa, where fires have prevented neither lions nor spotted hyenas from attacking their human prey.' The advantage of a fire is that it enables the approach of a dangerous wild beast to be observed. 'But that,' he writes, 'is a very different thing from an assumption that fire or light is in itself a protection; it may be an attraction, and it may reveal the presence of the camp to the prowler of the night.' He himself has often slept out in hot weather, under the stars, without camp-fire or lights, when there have been no man-eaters about.

Similarly Sir S. Eardley Wilmot, in his *Forest Life and Sport in India* (Edward Arnold, 1911) records how at one forest camp 'a tiger seized one of the men as they were sitting at their camp-fire, but the brute was driven off, and the wounded man was carried by his companion into the hut. But here the tiger returned later on, and dragged away the brave man who had already risked his life for his dying friend.'

—flat girdle-cakes of unleavened bread—then said *Salaam* to the people round the fire and climbed back into the car. The windscreen was opened and we travelled like gangsters with a gun poking through—'in case we see anything of the man-eater. . . .!'

In the morning, immediately after an early breakfast, the search was resumed.

There are two 'tiger times'—early morning, and sundown, 'when you can no longer see the lines on your hand'. It is possible to see the tiger at other times of the day, for his deviations from habit are unpredictable, but the general rule is that he lies up in the heat of the day, usually on wooded high ground, where he gets the shade of the trees but can keep an eye on what is happening in the plain. If he has a kill he will always lie up somewhere in its vicinity.

We returned to the river-bed and picked up pug-marks which led up into the deep grass where we had been the evening before. There was an excited chatter of monkeys in the tall trees, and the harsh warning call of a peacock—then suddenly a tremendous movement in the grass alongside the elephant and two forms rushed past. We saw nothing till they ran out into the open beyond the range of guns, and then we saw them plainly—two striped figures; running. There was the striped flash of their bodies between two clumps of low bushes on a ridge, and then they parted company, running in opposite directions, one heading for the river-bed.

The *mahaout* urged on the elephant in the direction of the river-bed. On our slow-moving mount we had no chance of heading the tiger off, but in the sand of the river-bed it would be possible to pick up pug-marks. When we at last got there we found that the chital, the little jungle deer, and the barking deer, had left the woods and run out into the open of the river-bed. There they huddled together in frightened herds, though the tigers, also in flight, had crossed lower down.

We picked up the expected pug-marks in the sand of the river-bed and followed them across, but farther up we found them going back—one tiger had recrossed to rejoin the other. The *mahaout* gave his tiger-call; if they were still looking for each other there might be a response.

But there was nothing. The jungle was silent again, the monkeys had ceased to chatter, the peacock and sambur to call. It was all over. But the whole thing had been highly irregular. Tigers should not be running together in January; November was the mating season—though tigers have been known to mate at other times.[1] And they shouldn't have been running anyhow, for the tiger doesn't run, normally. But these two had been playing, 'gaming in a patch of sunshine', and were not concerned with the etiquette of tigers evading stalkers. And they should have called to each other after they had separated. The Chief, the forester, and the *mahaout* were all puzzled—and a little put out.

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[1] G. P. Sanderson, in his *Wild Beasts of India* (1896) says that there is no fixed breeding season. Dunbar Brander, F.Z.S., F.R.G.S., says, in his *Wild Animals in Central India*, 'Tigers breed at all seasons.'

Sanderson considers the tiger altogether an erratic animal. 'Tigers,' he writes, 'frequently astonish those most conversant with their ordinary habits by some erratic conduct, and it is unsafe to condemn as untrue almost anything that may be related of their doings (as long as it is nothing of which they are physically incapable) merely because it is unnatural or unprecedented.'

But it was impressed upon us how extremely fortunate we had been, to see not one but two tigers on our first day in the jungle. People spend years in the jungles, it seems, without setting eyes on one. And beats had been arranged for viceroys and maharajahs, with forty elephants, and never a glimpse of a stripe, and the first evening we go out we hear a tiger very close, and the next morning we see two. . . . Everyone is much impressed.

We are impressed, too, but a little frightened. Also worried. We want very much to see all that the jungle has to show, and if possible to photograph it, but we do not want anything shot. We concede that the man-killer ought to be shot, for the safety of the forest people, but these two making love out-of-season and gaming in their patch of sunshine—we do not want them shot. We should love to see them again, and closer, but with all our hearts we pray that they may never be within gunshot range . . . but with so keen a *shikari* as our host that, alas, means we cannot wish them within camera range.

It is time now to say something in defence of the tiger, that most misjudged of beasts who, in the opinion of as distinguished a sportsman as Jim Corbett, is 'a large-hearted gentleman with boundless courage', an opinion, he declares, with which all sportsmen will agree, whether they have shot from a platform on a tree, the back of an elephant, or on their own feet. He maintains that unless public opinion rallies to his support he will become exterminated, and 'India will be the poorer by having lost the finest of her fauna'.

Major Corbett was given the freedom of the Indian forests for his services in the destruction of man-eaters in the Kumaon Hills. At Churgallia, and later at Dhikala, we were in 'Corbett country'. Everywhere we heard him spoken of with affection as a man, and admiration as a sportsmen. 'A very great *shikari*' is the expression generally used by forest-officers and rangers and those qualified to judge, and the words are always said in a tone of the utmost reverence. Corbett did not indulge in the contemptible so-called sport of shooting from the safety of a *machan*—tigers beaten up to the guns of sportsmen on a platform in a tree, by beaters on foot. He was even impatient of shooting 'from the broad back of an elephant'. He himself did all his stalking and his shooting on foot, and usually alone. And the tigers he stalked were man-eaters. In the case of normal tigers he is in favour of shooting with the camera instead of the rifle, for, he says, 'the taking of a good photograph gives far more pleasure to the sportsman than the acquisition of a trophy, and further, whilst the photograph is of interest to all lovers of wild life, the trophy is only of interest to the individual who acquired it'.

Corbett states categorically:[1]

'Human beings are not the natural prey of tigers, and it is only when tigers have been incapacitated through wounds or old age that, in order to live, they are compelled to take to a diet of human flesh. . . .'

He speaks of 'the tens of thousands of men, women and children who while working in the forests or cutting grass or collecting dry sticks, pass day after day close to where tigers are lying up who, when they return safely to their homes, do not even know that they have been under the observation of this so-called "cruel" and "blood-thirsty" animal'.

Our hostess in the jungle followed a tiger along the forest-track one day when out walking. He came out from the trees on to the path, looked at her, and continued on his way. She also continued on her way behind him. "I should have looked foolish to have returned to the bungalow just because I had seen a tiger," she said, simply. The beasts, she said, "having nothing to say to you if you don't interfere with them"; this is true of tigers, normally, but the bear is said to attack unprovoked, and the panther will do so after dark.

Jim Corbett records how as a boy he leaned over a bush in trying to stalk some jungle fowl and a tiger walked out from the other side. It turned its head and looked at him, and walked away.

Tigers, like lions, are very inquisitive; they will always stop and look—at a human being, at a car, at an elephant. They will even go away and come back for a second look—to their own undoing. Lions, our host told us, in particular, just came and stood about, in their curiosity, positively 'asking to be shot'. They 'committed suicide', he declared, and were not, therefore, interesting to shoot. The self-preservation instinct of animals does not extend to a general fear of human beings—which, human beings being what they are, is a pity.

As renowned a sportsman and great an authority on tigers as Brigadier-General R. G. Burton declares[2] that though the tiger, 'Generally represented as savage and blood-thirsty . . . is no more blood-thirsty than carnivorous man, except that he does his own killing, while man usually has his killing done for him, amounting in Great Britain to 40,000 creatures slaughtered daily for food'. He goes on to add: 'In his attitude towards man the tiger in general displays a desire to avoid contact or close acquaintance, and even the man-eater shows timidity in hunting human beings.'

He confirms what Corbett says about the normal behaviour of tigers in relation to human beings, when he records that when he shot a pair of old tigers in a jungle village the people spoke of them with respect as familiar objects, and neither feared them nor objected to their presence. Five other tigers which he shot in the near neighbourhood 'were quite unknown to the inhabitants'.

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[1] In *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (Oxford University Press, 1944).

[2] In *The Book of the Tiger* (Hutchinson, 1933).

Of man-eaters he says that 'it is exceptional for wild animals to take to man-eating'. As the prime causes for man-eating he gives disablement by age or injury, making it difficult to hunt and kill fast-moving animals, and in the case of age decayed teeth which make it difficult to break up cattle and tough-skinned beasts, whereas man with his soft flesh and thin skin is easily masticated.

He also cites the case of the tigress with cubs, who has difficulty in obtaining food, but whereas Corbett declares that the popular belief that the cubs of a man-eating tigress automatically become man-eaters 'is not borne out by actual facts', Burton asserts that the man-eating tigress 'passes on the taste for human flesh to her offspring'. Corbett says that the reason why the cubs of a man-eater do not themselves become man-eaters is that human beings are not the natural prey of tigers. The cubs will eat human flesh brought to them by the mother, for they will eat whatever their mother provides, and Corbett says that he has even known of tiger cubs assisting their mother to kill human beings, 'but', he insists, 'I do not know of a single instance of a cub, after it had left the protection of its parent, or after that parent had been killed, taking to killing human beings'.

Burton confirms what Corbett says about the tiger helping to preserve the balance in nature, and quotes an eminent Indian Moslem, the late Mr. Amir Ali, in a letter to *The Times*, August 4, 1928, to the effect that 'the ravages of game on crops in India are not nearly as marked as those of monkeys, which are protected both by Hindu religious susceptibilities and by the reluctance of most people to destroy them, and the damage done by domestic cattle in excess of human requirements; and these not confined to jungle areas but common to the whole of India'.

On this subject of 'the balance of nature', Mr. F. W. Champion, late of the Imperial Forest Service of India, and the author of *With a Camera in Tiger-Land*,[1] has some pertinent comments to offer. In the Reserved Forests of the United Provinces, and in many other parts of India, he says the balance of nature 'has been upset by the eternally interfering hand of man.'

He quotes in confirmation of this contention the views of some of India's leading sporting authors on the subject, notably the Hon. J. W. Best, and Mr. G. P. Sanderson, both as well known in India as Champion, Burton, and Corbett themselves.

Champion quotes Best as saying, 'Except for the rare man-eaters, a tiger, if left alone, is no more dangerous to human life than a pig, and is not so destructive to the farmers' interests, in many cases helping to keep harmful game within reasonable bounds. It is true that a number

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[1] Chatto and Windus, 1927.

Ready for Shikar

"Climbing an elephant presents no difficulties"

of cattle are killed off by tigers every year, but these, as often as not, are the barren old cows, superfluous and emaciated bulls or bullocks past their work, which, forming more than half of the village herds, eat up the grazing which should provide for more productive animals.'

He quotes Sanderson as saying very much the same—herds of old cattle are preserved because it is against Hindu tenets to take the life of the sacred cow; these useless animals are turned out into the jungles to graze, whereas 'A ryot is always careful of his really good cattle, taking them with him to his fields when working and tying them up there upon the divisions between the fields where there is really good grass'. Sanderson adds, 'It is a pity to see the tiger proscribed and hunted to death by every unsportsman-like method that can be devised, in response to popular outcries—chiefly in England—without foundation in fact, about his destructiveness. Trace out and slay every man-eater, by all means possible and at any expense; but ordinary tigers are exceedingly inoffensive and have their uses.'

Regarding a 'war of extermination' against the tiger Sanderson says the tiger might in turn justly present his little account 'for services rendered in keeping down wild animals which destroy crops. His agency in this respect goes far, in the opinion of many sportsmen of experience, towards counter-balancing the bill against him for beef.' It is pig and deer, he asserts, not the tiger and panther, which destroy crops, and they are kept in check by the animals designed by nature to prey upon them. Exterminate the tiger and panther and pig and deer would soon breed in numbers disastrous to land cultivation. The balance of nature, Sanderson points out, 'cannot be interfered with with impunity'.

Returning to the subject of the harmlessness, in general, of tigers, Brigadier-General Burton, in another of his books, *The Tiger Hunters*,[1] says that 'from the great wild beasts there is generally little or nothing to fear unless they are wounded or otherwise molested or angered, or unless there is a man-eater about'.

Similarly Sir S. Eardley Wilmot[2] declares that 'On the whole, the tiger is a pleasant-mannered and even-tempered beast provided he is not interfered with; if the reverse is found to be the case, it is probable that there is some reason for a soured or angry disposition . . .'

Mr. Champion says that he has had no experience of man-eaters, but that he has met tigers at close quarters, on foot and on an elephant, and they have never been hostile towards him. He records coming face to face with a tiger one morning, in bright sunlight, the distance between himself and his companion and the tiger being about five or six yards. The tiger immediately stopped dead, 'and the look of astonishment which appeared on his face was clearly visible to those two somewhat nervous *shikaris*'. He even once disturbed a tiger on its kill,

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[1] Hutchinson, 1936.

[2] In *Forest Life and Sport in India.*

Author beside a white-ant hill, Sitabani, United Provinces jungles which is generally considered to be highly dangerous, but though the tiger 'was a little cross at being disturbed and snarled at us . . . as we stood perfectly still he finally decided to go away without interfering with us in any way'.

He adds that had he and his companion shouted or attempted to run away there would almost certainly have been an accident, and that 'one cannot be too careful to stand quite motionless should one happen to meet a tiger unexpectedly'—which is what Corbett says.

Champion records the case of a bamboo cutter who surprised a tiger one day in the forest, and in his fear screamed and waved his arms about, 'with the natural result that the tiger, anticipating attack, killed him out of self-preservation'. He records other, similar cases, and his conclusions are that the jungle tiger of the United Provinces is not in any way dangerous unless (*a*) it has been wounded, (*b*) if he anticipates attack, or the loss of his food when hungry, (*c*) if it is during the breeding season, (*d*) if it is a tigress with cubs. He maintains that the theory that tigers and leopards take to man-eating when they are old or wounded 'is not always borne out by the records of man-eaters which have been destroyed in modern times'. Contrary to Corbett, he believes that man-eating tendencies can be inherited, or taught to the cubs by man-eating parents.

It will therefore be seen that even distinguished and experienced sportsmen are not in full agreement as to all the causes of man-eating, and particularly controversial is the point as to whether man-eating tendencies can be inherited or cubs taught to become man-eaters. All sportsmen, however, seem to be agreed that normally the tiger is harmless—that the man-eater is the exception, and rare.

In the chapter on flora and fauna in a little book entitled *Introduction to India*,[1] it is asserted: 'A common superstition is that tigers are not man-eaters unless they are disabled by old age or wounds. The fact is, however, that the majority of man-eating tigers, which are generally females, acquire the habit when, on cattle-lifting raids, they have once summoned up courage to attack the herdsman. Having once discovered how much easier it is to kill a man than a cow, such tigers may ever afterwards practise man-eating.' As, however, the writer of that passage refers to the tiger approaching its kill as a 'murderer' he would appear to be prejudiced, and the contention that the majority of man-eaters are female is not borne out by the experience of the most distinguished sportsmen. In Corbett's book of man-eaters only one, in fact, is a tigress.

I have described the call of the tiger on the prowl as a deep *ah-humm*. Champion, I find, describes it as 'faint moaning aouh'. The use of the adjective 'moaning' interests me as I used the word 'melancholy' in my notes after first hearing the cry.

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[1] By F. R. Moraes and Robert Stimson, published by the Indian Branch of the Oxford University Press, Revised edition, 1945.

This mournful, soft cry, however, is not the tiger's only cry; there is the roar and snarl of anger, which our host described as 'a very unpleasant sound', and which Champion declares is 'one of the most awe-inspiring sounds in Nature', and there is also a sound like the 'belling' of sambur, a short bark, about which there is much controversy. Champion calls it a 'pook', and discounts the idea often put forward that it is a deliberate imitation of the sambur's call, intended to deceive. Its resemblance to the sambur's call is not sufficiently marked to deceive so wary an animal, he says, and points to the fact that the general trend of correspondence on the subject in sporting and natural history papers suggests that it is not a hunting call at all, but has some connection with sex.

Burton also says that the difference between the sambur call and this 'titting', as it is called, is discernible, and 'is perhaps a mate call'. He quotes Mr. W. S. Thom, however, a sportsman and naturalist in Burma, as saying that it is 'not necessarily either a hunting or a mating call, but always a note of alarm or apprehension when the animal is suddenly disturbed or alarmed'. Sportsmen have often mistaken this titting for the sambur call, but Burton maintains that 'it does not seem probable that the call is deliberately made to attract the deer', adding, very sensibly, 'We know little or nothing of what passes in the minds of animals, but are prone to ascribe human modes of thought to account for their actions.'

Burton shares Corbett's fears that the tiger may become extinct in India—the lion is already almost so—and refers to the 'considerable destruction' of big game in India by the contemptible methods of 'shooting with the aid of spot-lights from tree shelters, stopped by the Game Wardens of Kenya, and dazzle headlights from night-prowling motor-cars, when the game stands still, fascinated by the glare'.

The latter was something of which we had a sickening experience later on in the jungles of the Central Provinces.

Although it appears to be so widespread in India it is in fact illegal to shoot 'either by artificial light or from wheeled traffic or between 45 minutes after sunset and half an hour before sunrise, except by special permission from the Divisional Forest Officer to destroy man-eating carnivora or cattle-killing carnivora doing damage near habitations'. It is 'absolutely prohibited', like the shooting of female sambur or stags with horns in velvet—yet we ourselves on one occasion had the misfortune to be with *shikaris* who did both, and by artificial light at that—light so powerful that it was clearly discernible that the one beast was a female, being antlerless, and that the antlered beast was in velvet. Such acts are illegal, but who is to stop them taking place—for in the depths of the jungle who is to know?

There are various methods of *shikar*. There is hunting with elephants, as we experienced it in the United Provinces; there is beating out the game with a line of beaters—village men and boys and even children—and driving it up to a *machan* where the 'sportsmen' sit in safety ready to shoot what is driven up to their guns; there is sitting up in a *machan* over a live or dead 'kill' set as bait; there is also the habit of sitting up in a *machan*, or in ambush, near water to which the animals come to drink. Powerful electric torches and spotlights are used, as the animals do not usually come till after dark. When there is a beat the sportsman will sometimes shoot on foot, or from the back of an elephant, but more often from a *machan*.

Some *shikaris*, both European and Indian, pay the beaters for their dangerous job; but quite often their services are secured by the system of unofficial forced labour for which the Hindu word is *begar*. Villagers who do not oblige by beating the forests and jungles when required may find their services there as forest-workers or grass-cutters not required, and any small privileges they may have there withdrawn; they are not paid, but they dare not refuse.[1]

The beating for a big shoot—organised, for example, for a maharajah—is sometimes done with a line of elephants.

Finally among *shikari* methods there is the abominable and completely unsportsman-like practice of shooting from cars or trucks, with the aid of dazzle-lights, a practice indulged in by European and Indian *shikaris* alike. I was delighted to find, on my return to England, that Paul Morand, has something to say on this practice in Indo-China in his book *Earth Girdled*. 'I know of nothing more cruel than the hunts with brilliant acetylene headlights,' he writes, in a chapter on 'The Equatorial Forest'. 'The hunters start after dinner, taking champagne with them. Every time two eyes gleam in the shadow, they shoot. They could just as easily put on full speed and run over the stupefied, dazzled tiger or stag. Shooting from a look-out where the hunter is perched, safe from attack, cannot be called "sport".'

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[1] Another and common form of *begar* is when petty Government Officials descend upon a village and demand service and supplies without payment, knowing that the people are afraid to refuse. Sir Malcolm Lyall Darling in his book *At Freedom's Door*, calls the *begari* 'a temporary conscript'. He and his companions on their great ride from Peshawar to Jubbulpore accepted the grass for their horses and wood for their kitchen and baths which the *begari* brought them in a village in the Vindya district, for 'without his services these necessities would be unprocurable. But we have at least endeavoured to give him a full wage for his time and trouble, and to pay him direct—very necessary if the amount is to reach him, but not easy, as he expects nothing and disappears as soon as his task is done'. Reginald Reynolds, in *The White Sahibs in India* (Secker & Warburg, 1937) writes, in his chapter on The Indian Village, 'No account of the evils which afflict the Indian villages would be complete without some reference to forced labour and the habit common to most officials when travelling through the country of obtaining food and other necessaries from the peasants without payment. The worst victims of such practices are always the most primitive peoples, such as the Gonds'.

Verrier Elwin has something to say on this exploitation of the Gonds, upon whom he is an authority, in his book *Leaves from the Jungle* (John Murray, 1936). '*Begar* is the curse of the aboriginal's life. . . . *Begar* kills the initiative of the people and ruins their self-respect.' He quotes the *Mandla District Gazetteer* as saying of the Gonds that 'Their ignorance and simplicity, combined with a naturally indolent and pleasure-loving temperament, have rendered them a very easy prey to the educated cunning and intelligence of Hindu aggression. Even the more honest and straightforward Hindus seem to think the simplicity of the Gond a fair mark'. . . .

Sir Malcolm Lyall Darling has a caustic comment to make on the use of searchlights in his book, *At Freedom's Door*:[1] 'In a country where religion forbids the taking of animal life', he writes, 'unless, like the snake and the mad dog, it is positively dangerous, it is curious to hear of strong searchlights being set up in the jungle to enable the privileged to see the way a tiger will approach and kill a tied-up goat or buffalo and teach his cubs to do the same.'

We ourselves more than once heard Indians use the expression about 'seeing the fun' of watching a tiger come to a live kill, and were present when a Hindu lady discussed with a *shikari* the matter of procuring some goats to tie as kills for panthers, to initiate her young son into *shikar*. On another occasion an Indian *shikari* gave us a quite vivid description of watching from a *machan* a tiger leap on a tied goat and 'drink its blood'.[2]

But the Indians who have such veneration for the cow that they will not have it killed even when it is old and dry and useless, but who do not hesitate to tie up live buffalo calves and goats as kills for tigers, or to shoot beautiful and innocent creatures like samburs and chital, are not after all so very different from the ardent British 'animal lovers' who do not hesitate to hunt fox and stag and the otter, and to have gentle creatures such as bullocks and sheep, and the little calves and lambs they find so pretty—'sweet' is the word they generally use—slaughtered for food. Devotion to the dog and the horse merely replaces for the 'animal-loving' Christians the Hindu devotion to the cow.[3]

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[1] Oxford University Press, 1949.

[2] There is no agreement among sportsmen as to whether a tiger does or does not suck the blood of its kill. Dunbar Brander and G. P. Sanderson assert categorically that it does not, with supporting evidence. An equally distinguished sportsman, the Hon. J. W. Best, O.B.E., however, maintains, in his *Shikar Notes for Novices* (The Pioneer Press, Allhabad, 1924) that he does. Describing the kill he says, 'One generally finds the neck broken and twisted into an unnatural position; on both sides of the neck there are two clean and neat punctures, where the tiger has drunk his victim's blood by dividing the jugular vein. . . . There is seldom any trace of large quantities of blood spilled near a kill.'

[3] But Hindu inconsistency reaches even to the sacred cow itself, for though it may not in any circumstances be killed it may be allowed to starve. Almost every Indian town and city has gaunt, raw-boned, half-starved homeless cows wandering its streets nosing in the gutter for garbage, and heaven only knows where, in many cases, they get water. Indians to whom we suggested that this was a strange way of showing respect for the cow merely smiled and replied that nevertheless this was the custom; the cow had freedom to roam where it willed. It would have been more correct to have said starved where it willed.

The Hon. J. W. Best in his *Shikar Notes for Novices* makes an ironic comment on the fact that Hindus will supply buffalo calves or decrepit bullocks to *shikaris* as kills for tigers. 'They will not sell you these,' he writes. 'Oh no! this would be selling a bullock to a sahib to be killed by a tiger, a most irreligious thing to do. If, however, the bullock *happens* to be killed by a tiger, the owner will be only too glad to accept a few rupees as a consolation to him in his horror at the sacriligious accident. Some *Ahirs* will lend out buffalo calves on the same terms.'

There is a good deal of controversy on the ethics of tying up a live kill. Jim Corbett's habit in the Kumaon Hills was to follow his man-eaters up on foot, and he did not often tie kills, though on the few occasions when he did so he appears to have had no qualms about it. It could certainly be legitimately contended that the sacrifice of a buffalo or a goat to bait a tiger which was taking toll of human life was fully justified. But the sacrifice of one animal in order to snare another purely for 'sport' is surely another matter.

Mr. Champion, on the other hand, would not have got his splendid collection of tiger photographs if he had not tied up kills, but he admits to qualms about it whilst acknowledging its necessity. He adds that a buffalo is a placid and stupid creature with practically no nerves, that it dies as swiftly in a tiger's attack as it would at the butcher's to which it would otherwise have gone, since only males are used. He quotes Best on the subject as saying much the same, and that he does not think the animals suffer at all 'except possibly from loneliness and sometimes from the cold'. He does not think they suffer from nerves. Certainly they can have no apprehension of their danger. We too readily attribute to animals the mental processes and emotions of man. The only kill we saw tied up was eating away calmly enough under its tree. Champion quotes Colonel A. E. Stewart, in his *Tiger and Other Game*, as saying that the suffering of a tied kill 'is not half that of the ordinary sheep which is killed daily by our butchers'.

Champion records sitting in a *machan* over a bait at night, 'with a tiger roaring not far away, as the buffalo continued peacefully to masticate the fodder placed in front of him, until he actually dozed off with the roars still going on in the distance. I do not think that he even knew what the roars were, and I am sure that he did not suffer in any way.' He adds that nevertheless he does not like 'this live-bait business' and uses it reluctantly as a last resource which he would gladly abandon if he could find any satisfactory alternative.

Champion, incidentally, declares that very few tigers 'unless very hard-pressed indeed'—will touch an animal they have not killed themselves. It might seem presumptuous to disagree with so experienced a sportsman, but his statement in this matter is not borne out by the facts as we experienced them in the same district, for the dead kills our host put down were taken, despite plenty of live sambur, chital, and cattle in the district, and he assured us that he had proved that not merely will a tiger eat a kill it has not killed itself but in his personal experience it will eat another tiger! He had even, he insisted, found a case in which a tiger had *knowingly* eaten another tiger (the dead tiger he had put down as bait had of course been skinned). The advantage of a dead kill, he maintained, is that the smell attracts; in the case of a live kill the tiger may or may not be passing near enough to spot it, or scent it, whereas with a dead kill, which soon becomes 'high', the tiger will go out of his way to find out where and what it is.

Dunbar Brander, in his book *Wild Animals in Central India*,[1] states categorically, 'tigers will eat any fresh carcass they may happen across, and I have even known them eat animals which were absolutely putrid'. He cites several instances of personal observation in this matter (he was himself a conservator of forests in India) and an instance of tiger eating tiger—a male tiger killing and eating his son in a fight over a buffalo carcass.

Mr. G. P. Sanderson, in his *Thirteen Years Among the Wild Beasts of India*,[2] cites an incident of three tigers eating a fourth, and quotes other eminent sportsmen as reporting similar cases.

Valentine Ball, the distinguished geologist, in his *Jungle Life in India*[3], records the case of a tiger and a cub eating the carcase of a bear which he had shot. 'At one time,' he writes, 'it was supposed that tigers would not touch carrion; but this is now known on the most complete evidence to be incorrect, and that moreover they will eat bodies of animals, which have not been killed by themselves, even when in an advanced state of decomposition.'

Brander declares that tigers possess very little sense of smell, and that the little they possess they seldom use. He asserts that a man-eating tigress will bring up her cubs to kill man. All authorities seem agreed that the tiger rushes, not springs, upon its prey. Brander regards the tiger as an animal of 'extraordinarily little intelligence'. He says that one hardly ever comes across a tiger which has died a natural death. In the Central Provinces of India, he writes, most tigers 'are killed from *machans*, either by sitting up, or in beats'.

Champion, Best, and the others, are probably right about the tendency to sentimentalise over live kills—though Champion admits to not liking the business—but it is difficult for anyone with a sympathy for animals not to do so. The evening we saw a buffalo calf being taken along a track in the jungle, to be tied up as a kill, we felt wretched about it. It was a miserable looking little creature which had been used for vaccine for smallpox; it was sick, and as our host said, would die in any case.

"So you want to ensure it a merciful death by tiger?"

He roared with laughter and patted my shoulder.

"It's all right," he said.

Which is what he had said, with the same affectionate gesture, the evening before, when it had taken about eight shots to kill a stag sambur[1]—the last few shots at close range, whilst the beautiful creature sat in the long grass, where it had collapsed, plugged full of lead, and looked at the elephant, and at the gun levelled at it. And it wasn't in the least all right; and it wasn't now. . . .

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[1] Edward Arnold & Co., 1923.
[2] W. H. Allen & Co., 1896.
[3] Thos De la Rue & Co., 1880.

"We don't want to see anything else killed," I said, doggedly.

"There won't be any shooting," he said, "We'll just have a look round."

But for a gentleman who was just going out to have a look round, we thought, as no less than three rifles went up on the back of the elephant, he was singularly well armed.

As a matter of fact there was no shooting that evening—unless you count a little potting at wild boar, which run with incredible speed through the long grass and are almost invisible, traceable only by the movement of the grass. It was as well we failed to bag any, as the *mahaout* was so strict a Mohammedan that on a previous occasion he had refused to have the pig when killed strung up on the elephant, and it had had to be dragged behind.

We never minded pig being shot at; the wild boar is an ugly brute, and the male, the 'tusker', has a spiteful habit of charging on sight. Also the camp people, and the people who cut grass and worked in the forests, were always clamouring for meat. The Moslems in the camp would not touch pig, of course, but they were in a minority, and the people in the grass-huts were much too hungry to stand on points of Hindu orthodoxy about meat-eating. They came begging the dead sambur which had been put down for a kill, and which after a day in the hot sun was already beginning to smell. They were told they could have it in a day or two, if the tiger didn't take it. It would be very high indeed, by then, I urged, but was assured "They would eat it rotten." The tiger, as it turned out, didn't take it, and another sambur had to die, but we were in disgrace over our reaction to the shooting of the first sambur and not taken on that expedition.

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[1] Champion records a similar incident in *With a Camera in Tigerland*, in which after six shots at a sambur the creature still lived; it was impossible to approach the wildly lashing creature to finish it off with a knife, and he was forced to return to the camp three miles away to fetch more cartridges 'in order to put the poor beast out of his misery'. He adds that the incident taught him a lesson, and that never again will he shoot big game unless absolutely forced to do so to provide meat for the camp. He adds, 'Many others are following the same road, and it is devoutly to be hoped that hunting with the camera will ultimately replace that kind of hunting—however great its charms—which made its appeal to earlier generations.' Corbett expresses a similar hope in his *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*.

Paul Morand records in his book, *Earth Girdled*, his first sight of the tiger in the equatorial forest: 'The natives got on his track rather late. The sun was already high when they showed me the beast in a ravine far below. Tired out by his work of the night, he was asleep, enjoying a siesta, peacefully lying on his back, his paws spread wide; his jaws open, he was showing his teeth, smiling at the light. He showed his belly; only his back was striped. I am fond of cats. Tigers are but weaker cats, being unhappy and persecuted. It did not enter my head to use all the Colts, Winchesters, Brownings and Gastinnes which I had brought with me to the Far East. In the equatorial forest man is the intruder. The animals, more than anywhere else, are in their home. I had no course but to depart. Others may tell of 'their first tiger'; I tell of my last. I sold all my firearms on reaching the town.'

The evening the sick little buffalo calf was tied up our host decided we should walk for a while, so we followed along a grassy track behind the elephant, with two boys ahead, leading the kill. Along the track we found fresh tiger droppings.

"So you see," said our host, exultantly, "you are walking on the tiger's path!"

We creased our faces into expressions designed to convey pleasure, and glanced nervously up and down the path. It had already been explained to us that the tiger likes to come out of cover and walk along paths in the evenings. And there was a tigress with cubs in the vicinity. . . .

Tiger droppings are composed almost entirely of hair, as he eats hide, hair and all. Rings have been found in the droppings of a man-eater. A man-eater will devour the clothing as well as all else, if it is sufficiently soaked in blood.

We walked for some time along the tiger's path, and then got up on to the elephant. Everything was quiet; no chattering of monkeys, no sambur call, no cry of peacock. The usual water-bird called mournfully along the river-bed. Occasionally the wattled plover, the 'brain-fever bird', plunged wildly about the sky with its frenzied did-you-do-it-did-you-do-it-did-you-do-it, every now and then breaking into a stutter—did-you-did-you-did-you-do-it. But these bird noises were somehow part of the deep stillness. Fear did not set the jungle jittering and calling, because the tiger had not walked that way. The *mahaout* halted the elephant once at the sight of a stag sambur moving gracefully through the trees, its lovely head top-heavy with antlers; we looked at it and let it go; there was no need to shoot a sambur that evening.

Because nothing appeared to be happening we felt we could relax. Unlike Mr. Huxley we found it pleasant on the elephant, though after a few hours of it the back begins to ache. But it was pleasant going gently along looking into the tops of the strange trees, or crashing through dense jungle full of a green twilight, and trees from which hang great ropes of tendrils reaching for the ground to root themselves there. When a young tree blocked the way with its trunk and a tangle of branches, at a word from the *mahaout* the elephant would break it off with his trunk as easily as one might pick a flower. If anything were dropped from the *katolah* the elephant would pick it up and hand it back. Once she stopped dead for no immediately discernible reason, then looking round we discovered that the forester's coat had fallen off the back of the *katolah*; the elephant was aware that something had fallen and refused to budge until it was picked up.

This particular elephant was called Lightning, not because of any exceptional speed, but because of the quickness of its awareness of the presence of tiger. Before the tiger had been heard or seen the *mahaout* would be aware of its presence by the sudden tension of the elephant's body, and the taut swaying movement of its trunk. Lightning was also a good *shikar* elephant because she would stand firm as a rock when the shooting began, unlike some elephants who are restive and nervous.

In passing it should perhaps be remarked that there appears to be as much diversity of opinion concerning the intelligence of elephants as the habits of tigers. Champion considers that quickness of comprehension does not constitute ingelligence but only docility in captivity and response to training—the latter to a higher degree than that of a horse but not to the same degree as a dog. He quotes Sanderson—'probably the greatest authority on elephants that ever lived'—in his *Thirteen Years Among the Wild Beasts* as maintaining that the intelligence of the elephant is 'greatly over-rated', and that 'the elephant in its natural state displays less intelligence than most wild animals', as an example of which he cites the ease with which wild elephants are captured and escaped elephants recaptured.

Champion asks 'If the elephant were possessed of the amount of discernment with which he is credited it is reasonable to suppose that he would continue to labour for man instead of turning into the nearest jungle?' The answer to that could be that the great animal's spirit is broken in training—but more of this when we reach Mysore and the 'elephant lines'. It is perhaps difficult, as Champion says, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusions. He quotes Theodore Roosevelt in his *African Game Trails* as declaring that the intelligence of the elephant is 'matched only, if at all, by the highest apes, and possibly by one or two of the highest carnivores'.

The sun went down and the moon came up and everything was held in a soft but clear silver light, for the moon was at the full. We left the jungle and came out on to a forest track between the tall sal trees. We were relaxed and chatting; there seeming to be no possibility of tiger. Our host flashed his torch sometimes into the darkness of the trees and picked out herds of chital, their eyes shining like gig-lamps. If all our evening excursions on the elephant were like this, we thought, how much more enjoyable they would be! We were very happy as we were borne along the grassy track, with the lights of the elephant-station and the red glow of the fires outside the huts already visible through the trees. Then suddenly without warning, it came:

Ah-humm-m! Ah-humm-m!

Immediately all was tension. We sat silent and rigid on the elephant.

Ah-humm-m!

Even experienced *shikaris* admit that their hearts quicken at that sound. It is perhaps the most eerie experience in life, that strong, deep, up-from-the-belly, yet strangely soft cry, heard in the moonlit jungles. When it stops you hear the incessant commotion of the crickets again, and the beating of your heart. There is a deep melancholy in the call. *Come*, it says, *come!*

It is the end of all peace and stillness, that cry. There is a tree-top agitation of birds and monkeys, the sharp frightened warning of the sambur. *Run, run; hide; hide; the tiger is awake and on the move again. . . .*

Whether there is a smile on the face of the tiger, who shall say; there is certainly a smile on the face of the Chief Conservator of Forests as he leans forward over the *mahaout* and touches him on the shoulder and makes a forward gesture with a hand.

We cannot share his exultation; we had been so nearly home—safely home. Now, who knows what terrors and dangers the night holds?

We leave the track and plunge back into the dense undergrowth, heading in the direction of the sound, and following the warning in the tree-tops. This way and that we plunge, bruising the pungent smell out of thick fleshy-leaved bushes, crashing through branches which swipe our faces, try to scalp us, try to throttle us. Usually the *mahaout* holds back the branches, but not now, for now all his exertions are to hastening the elephant in the direction of that repeated *Ah-humm-m! Ah-humm-m!* This way and that, always coming nearer the sound, searching the undergrowth by the light of a powerful electric torch, part of the fear and excitement vibrating now through all that moonlight wilderness.

Two of us are feeling cold and sick with nerves; there is the feeling of O-God-get-me-out-of-this-and-I'll-never-do-it-again. One could easily tremble; there are all the sensations of being in the 'blitz' when the bombs are falling close. What happens when you come upon a tiger in the moonlight? What happens if an elephant bolts in this dim tangle of tree-trunks and branches and rope-like aerial roots?

When for a little while there have been no more cries the *mahaout* halts the elephant and all listen. The forester says something and the *mahaout* and our host exchange a few words, and suddenly the latter bursts out laughing.

"We are completely lost!" he says, and his large body shakes with laughter. "Neither the *mahaout* nor the forester nor I have the slightest idea where we are!"

The *mahaout* grins over his shoulder. He is a very dark-skinned little man, with a long and curling moustache; he loves *shikar* and, as we know, has no regard for his own life and very little for anyone else's. Now his thin shoulders hunch up and he too shakes with laughter. We regard the Chief and the *mahaout* with dismay and turn to the young forester behind. He is kneeling up in the *katolah* and though he does not actually rock with laughter like the other two he is smiling.

"What's funny about it?" I demand, crossly. "What are we going to do?"

"God knows," says the Chief, simply, and the tears of mirth glisten in his eyes.

The forester searches the sky, through a gap in the tree-tops. Our host flashes his torch round at the trees. We read 'Sal, 1934.'

"Does that convey anything to you?" I asked, hopefully.

"I wasn't in this division in 1934," he replied.

There is some conversation between him and the forester in which the word 'sal' occurs several times, and the forester continually searches the sky.

"We have gone round in circles," the Chief chuckles, and waves the *mahaout* on.

It seems a very long time before the forester finally extricates us by the aid of the stars. We are very cold, and our backs ache. It is some hours since we left the bungalow in the warm sundown and raced in the car down to the elephant-station. It seems in other worlds long ago that we sat relaxed and happy listening to the crickets and admiring the moonlight on the tall sal trees.

When we at last get back to the bungalow our hostess is sitting beside the log fire in the wide hearth warming her bare toes, her white *sari* falling gracefully round her.

"How late you are!" she exclaims as we enter.

"We got lost," her husband tells her, and chuckles. "Com-plete-ly lost!"

"The servants say they heard the tiger calling."

His amusement evaporates.

"We lost him too," he admits ruefully .

"Good!" says our hostess, who dislikes *shikar*, and calls to the table-boy to bring in the soup.

There is no excitement in the world like tiger-hunting, our host declares. We begin to understand what he means. It is an excitement which grows on one. When we are out on the elephant and frightened we always vow 'never again', but once we are safely back at the bungalow courage returns, and the next time, in full remembrance of how frightened we were the time before, we nevertheless go out again.

I have an entry in my journal, written in the jungle: "I wish I didn't always feel so full of fear when we go out on the elephant looking for tiger. We all have fear—Jean's is that an animal will be shot; Chats' fear is that a tiger will not come within shooting range; my own is the purely personal fear of danger—of what may happen if a tiger does come within range—fear of the wounded animal charging, fear of the elephant bolting. Every time we go out I am afraid. Lately I have felt sick with nerves as soon as we are on the elephant, but the fear is greatest once the sun has gone down; then all my blood seems to listen, I dread to hear a sambur bark. Every time we come close to the cry of a tiger I swear that if I survive this expedition unscathed I will never go out again—and still I go. It seems that the moment fear or pain has passed one remembers only intellectually and becomes 'fearless' again. Truly 'we live but we do not learn'."

But the fear was not only on the elephant. Sometimes in the afternoons, when we were left to our own devices, we would go for a walk in the forests, or along jungle tracks, sometimes just the two of us, sometimes with our hostess. When we went with her there would usually be an orderly following along behind, and always when she went alone she would be escorted—though as the orderly did not carry a gun it was never clear to us what purpose he served. For ourselves, we disliked this business of being followed; it seemed sense to us that if we had to have an escort the orderly should walk with us, not trek along behind. We always refused escort by orderlies—which was not always as easy as it sounds.

On these walks I was always nervous and uneasy. Once walking with our hostess along a narrow track flanked by scrubby bushes a herd of wild boar ran out. We stopped and looked. Fortunately there was no tusker with them.

"Supposing there had been?" I asked.

"The thing to do is to step aside, out of their way," she said. "The tusker always charges straight ahead."

We saw several wild cats on our walks—and far too many pug-marks of tigers. One hot afternoon, in search of coolness, we followed a narrow path up a slope through a dense wood. Quite early on we picked up the familiar footprints. Although the ground was hard-baked from the heat they were very clearly imprinted on the light surface dust.

I could only find depressing my companion's interested observation that "he must be a very heavy tiger to make such clear pug-marks on such hard ground."

We followed the footprints on up through the wood, and I reflected that tigers like to lie up in the shade in the heat of the day, and that they like high ground. . . .

I inquire, despairingly, "What will you do if we meet the tiger?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," is the cheerful answer.

Later we followed the same path on the elephant and pointed out to the forest-officer who accompanied us the pug-marks we had found. When we told him we had followed these footprints on foot he seemed surprised.

"You are very brave," he said.

"What would you recommend we should do if we ever meet the tiger—on foot?" I asked.

"Stand still," he said, and then added, "and try and get a picture."

We were walking along by the edge of this wood one afternoon with the high elephant-grass on the other side of the track when we heard a sound of movement among the trees, as of the plunge of a heavy body, and then a sambur called.

The distance was as far to go back as to go on. Besides, there was no point in going back; either way there was a long stretch of high grass on one side and deep forest on the other. Going back would bring us eventually to some forest crossroads, where the pug-marks were always numerous. Either you walk in the jungle and get used to being apprehensive, or you don't walk at all.

But so often I would think with nostalgia of the English woods where—of the things that move on four legs—you may walk all day disturbed by nothing but a rabbit. The blessed cool green English woods where you may walk without fear. To be able to walk without developing a nervous headache seemed in itself so blessed.

Not that my companion experienced any such nervousness. Her argument was always Jim Corbett's—that hundreds of people, thousands, worked all the time in the Indian jungles and forests, cutting grass, clearing undergrowth, and going to and fro to their huts, all completely unarmed.

It was never an argument that carried any weight with me, however.

"From time to time one gets killed by a tiger," I would reply, morosely.

"They always know where there is a man-eater about," was another argument.

"Once someone has been killed," I would point out. "Then they know. But someone has to be killed first. In man-eating as in all else, there has to be a first time. And in this particular forest division," I added, bitterly, "we know there is a man-eater, a wounded tiger, and a tigress with cubs. . . ."

"The tiger who killed the man cutting grass wasn't a man-eater. It was obviously an accident. You heard what Chats said. And the wounded tiger hasn't killed anyone, though it was months ago he was wounded."

"He hasn't killed anyone *yet*," I pointed out.

"What's the good of thinking about it? Anything can happen to anyone if it comes to that!"

To which piece of philosophising there is no answer, in the jungle or out of it. I continued to go for walks when asked to, and I continued to feel uneasy.

Before we left England there was a joke that from the jungles Jean would send home a cable: 'Ethel eaten by tiger. Writing.' It seemed rather a gay joke, then. When we were actually in the jungles and Reginald wrote referring to the promised cable it no longer seemed funny; but, on the contrary, in bad taste. . . .

There is a morning when we do not go out tiger-stalking, our host being busy in his office with the bane of a forest officer's life—timber contractors. There is a dispute about being allowed to move timber from a depot before it is paid for; the contractors say that until they are allowed to move it they cannot get their money for it, and so cannot pay. We are handed over to the forest-ranger; we have expressed a wish to walk in the valley up which the bungalow looks, and the forest-ranger is to escort us. We would prefer to go alone, but the ranger is a pleasant young man and at least he won't trek along behind us.

He takes a gun and we set out. We have barely entered the valley before we disturb a peacock in the undergrowth beside the rough track. The ranger is immediately alert.

"Shall I shoot it for you?" he inquires.

"For us? What should we do with it?"

"It is very good to eat. Myself I do not eat peacock—but for you——"

"We, also, do not eat peacock," I reply firmly.

We pass a dark little grass-hut shop, brass vessels gleaming on the floor in the interior dimness, and cross the river, where the bridge has been washed away by the heavy rains but across which planks and tree-trunks have been thrown to form an improvised bridge. The track climbs up and becomes a passable road. We meet a party of thin-legged bare-footed men and boys who have finished a forestry job up in the hills and are now going back to their villages. They salute the ranger and we give them '*Salaam*'. On the steep slope just below the road men are working hauling up boulders to make a parapet. They keep a small fire going on the road from which to light their hookahs. Here and there we find the remains of primitive cigars, the tobacco wrapped in green leaves. We also find, and spend a little time in examining, large, clear, fresh pug-marks.

"The tiger must have been along this road last night," the ranger observes.

The road rises steeply, and the river is far down below. On the far bank the woods are thin and sunlit, and the ground strewn with boulders.

We stand and look across, listening to the torrent, and the unceasing kok-kok-kok of the barbet, the little green copper-smith bird, and breathing, gratefully, the cool clean morning air.

"The tiger is probably watching us," says the ranger, his keen forester's eyes under the broad-brimmed hat searching across the valley to the sunny stony ground under the sparse trees. "He is probably lying up there basking in the warmth on a sunny boulder."

"We saw no pug-marks when we crossed the bridge."

"He wouldn't have crossed the bridge. He would have swum across."

Cats though they are, tigers like water, and in the hot weather lie in it, like cattle. In the cool weather they like to bask in the sun, but they suffer in great heat, and then seek the shade of forests or the coolness of water.

On the lower slopes of the wooded hills cattle were to be seen moving about among a collection of grass huts.

"The hill people," said the ranger, "come down in the cold weather and seek sheltered places in the sun. When the weather becomes hot they will go back again."

We saw some of these hill people on the way back, men and women and children, washing in the river. They had a fire, and there were brass pots pushed in among the ashes. The women had heavy ear-rings and were covered with ornate necklaces and thick jewelled bangles. They regarded us with a friendly interest, and the women returned our smiles. They were high-caste Hindus, the ranger told us, making their ablutions before eating.

We fell to talking of Hindu customs, and we asked him about a procession which had passed the cross-roads the day before. It had consisted of a ramshackle bus, decorated with tawdry red and white paper garlands and crowded with people, brown faces peering out from the open framework of the windows; it was followed by an open lorry in which there were musicians producing confused noises from brass instruments, cymbals, and bagpipes, and behind this was a car, the driver of which was decorated with flowers, and his face almost invisible behind a vizier of gold chains.

This, it seems, was a wedding party; the ornamented young man was on his way to meet his bride. They had stopped at the cross-roads 'café' for refreshment. In Hindu wedding arrangements both parties are required by the families concerned to submit their horoscopes to an astrologer, and if they are not harmonious, according to the stars, the wedding cannot take place. But, said the ranger, in such a case the parties consult a second or even a third astrologer, and 'agreement is invariably reached'. Great importance is attached to this harmony of the horoscopes of the prospective bride and bridegroom, and only the most unorthodox would go ahead and contract a marriage in defiance of it. When the horoscopes are agreed, it is for the priests and astrologers of the two families to check up genealogies and pedigrees, and when all this is done and the dowry settled, a date can be fixed for the betrothal ceremony.

In orthodox families the marriages are arranged by the parents, and the proposal of marriage comes from the girl's father—it is assumed that a father of a son can always find a wife for a son, whereas a daughter is in an inferior position, so that the bargaining must be done by her family. When the marriage contract is agreed upon the bridal couple are sometimes allowed to meet once, in the presence of their families. They are expected to abide by the parents' decisions, and any resistance is invariably smoothed out by 'persuasion'. A Hindu marriage contract is not lightly broken off, and in point of fact seldom is.

The wedding feast lasts a number of days according to the family's social status; in wealthy high-caste families it can last ten days; with the poor it is a matter of a day only, but no expense must be spared, so that poor people accrue debts out of all proportion to their means in order to conform with this convention, and a girl's wedding can be ruinous. Indeed in a poor family the birth of a daughter can never be anything but a calamity. Not merely must a dowry be provided, but it is usual for the wedding ceremony and feast to take place at the bride's house. It has been said that every Hindu is expected to spend more than he can afford upon a wedding.

As to the little bride—she is often no more than sixteen—she is almost weighed down with ornaments—bangles, anklets, necklaces, ear-rings, nose-rings, the outward and visible signs of her family's substance. On train journeys a bride and her family would often get into our compartment, and even when her husband was travelling in a separate compartment great care would be taken—usually by the mother—to keep the girl's *sari* well over her face, to conceal all but the eyes. This is still more important when the husband is travelling with the party, for then the utmost care must be taken that she shall not be seen being seen by her husband. . . .

The forest-ranger lent us a copy of Jim Corbett's *Man Eaters of the Kumaon* after our walk and talk in the valley. He spoke of the author with great veneration, both as a man and as a *shikari*.

In the evening of that day we went out again on the elephant and stayed out, beating the woods and the deep grass, until the moon was high, but saw and heard only chital and monkeys. But when we got back to the cross-roads, where the car waited, we found the driver in a great state of excitement, because as it was growing dark a male tiger had wandered down the track (that 'path of the tiger' along which we had so recently walked) and stopped in front of the car and stood and looked for several minutes. The driver admitted that he had been unnerved as he had no gun with him, and he had started up the car, whereupon the tiger had strolled on past the car and down the track ahead, in the opposite direction to which we had gone. Our host all but ground his teeth in his exasperation.

But his luck was altogether out, for he went out early the following morning, soon after sunrise, to ascertain whether the second sambur he had put down as bait two days ago had been taken—it had been still there and untouched the previous day. This time it had gone. The next step was to trace where the tiger had taken it and set up a *machan* over the kill. If only the tiger had found and taken the kill yesterday this would have been possible; but now there was no time in which to follow up the clue, as we were breaking camp that day and there could be no question of our postponing our departure, as a *shikar* party was moving in within a few hours of our leaving. He met the tigress and cubs he knew to be in the district, but in these he was not interested.

It was all the worst possible luck. If only the tiger had made his move a day earlier! But tigers are as unpredictable as human beings in their conduct. A *shikari's* life is made up of disappointments, and "You have to work very hard for your tigers!"

More and more it seemed to us, as we were initiated into the manœuvres of *shikar*, that the whole thing is like a game of chess, in which each new move is determined by the opponent's previous move. The tiger had made his move, and the next move was for the *shikari*, and clearly indicated, and it was bitterly disappointing not to be able to make it. Now all that had happened was that the tiger had been provided with a meal, gratis, and would most probably be bagged by the party moving in.

"They," said our hostess, bitterly, "will shoot everything that moves!"

She was of our own opinion, that all this indiscriminate killing was senseless. We thought of the little chital we had seen down in the river-bed, with their young, such pretty, harmless, delicate things, and the sambur moving with such dignity and grace through the forests, and the mating tigers gaming in their patch of sunshine, and felt sad. If the sambur and the chital must die prematurely, better they should die according to the laws of nature from their natural enemies—better the tigers should indulge their normal appetities and slay deer, than be starved of their natural food and turn to man-eating. Let all things be, and the balance of nature be preserved.

But to 'bag a tiger' seems to be the ambition of every Englishman who goes out to India. A young man we encountered on the road the day we left for Sitabani was typical. Our car had broken down, and we were overtaken by a jeep in which the Englishman travelled with an Indian forest-officer. After some discussion it was decided that the females of our party—we two and our hostess—should proceed to Haldwani in the jeep. The English youth, catching sight of the *machan* platform on the back of the car, inquired, eagerly, if we had 'had any luck with it'. I told him no, and added, "I'm glad to say!"

This, however, did not prevent him from telling a story of a 'young missionary lad' who had only been out there a few months and had 'bagged a tigress and her two cubs'. When I snorted, "Disgusting!" he said. "Oh, I don't know—blood-sports, you know—"

But that was the end of the conversation; the sentence was left in mid-air.

It came to me, in the ensuing silence, that one of the few advantages of becoming middle-aged is that it enables you to snort. When one is female, by the time one is sixty and has qualified for a lorgnette it will no longer be necessary to snort; one will merely raise the lorgnette and *look*.

I have an idea I shall qualify long before sixty.

III

SITABANI THE BEAUTIFUL

SITABANI—so-called because according to legend it was here that Sita lived in exile, following her rescue by Rama, after a long and bitter fight, from her abductor Ravana—is a place of pilgrimage by the devout. It consists of a forest rest-house, two temples, one disused, a hostel in course of construction for the pilgrims, and a few grass huts.

The forest rest-house is at the top of a hill which looks across a valley in which a river divides round a long wooded island. The hills rise to a great height here, retreating range upon range into the distance; those in the foreground are thickly wooded. We had been told that it was 'a very beautiful place'. It is, in fact, quite breath takingly beautiful.

We lunched at the Haldwani forest rest-house and left there at half-past three, but though Sitabani is only thirty miles distant the moon was high by the time we reached there; the forest roads are bad, and a number of rivers had to be forded. We stopped to call on the divisional forest-officer at a rest-house six miles from Sitabani, and the talk which had hitherto been all of tiger now included panther as well. The D.F.O. had wounded a panther some three weeks ago, but as no more had been seen or heard of him he was presumed dead.

As we stepped out of the car into the compound there was a sudden flash of brilliant green through the air as a flock of parrots flew up. They were the first we had seen and seemed to us excitingly beautiful, but when we exclaimed on their beauty we were told they were 'a great nuisance'.

When we left this rest-house the car climbed up through dense forests to Sitabani. On the last lap the road swings round the hill and finishes at the rest-house verandah. There is a broad terrace with a low parapet, below which the hillside drops away sharply down to the river. There is a perpetual sound of the torrent, and the great hills in the tremendous Indian moonlight have a quite unearthly beauty.

There had been some doubt as to whether we should be able to get here, as there had been heavy rains which seemed likely to make the river-beds impassable. Our host was delighted that we had succeeded in making the journey, for, said he, "the beauty of this place is that the moment you're outside the door you're in tiger country!"

It is also bear and panther country. Bears have a habit of climbing trees, so that in bear country it is as well never to shelter under a tree, from sun or rain, without looking up it first.

Champion considers the bear 'by far the most dangerous animal in the forest to the ordinary unarmed workman or traveller', but he believes that they are so not from innate viciousness—which is the common belief—but because their sight is so poor that they do not realise an intruder is near until the potential enemy is almost on top of them, when they panic and charge, inflicting the most dreadful wounds, generally facial, with their huge claws. To be mauled by a bear is one of the most horrible of forest accidents. The loss of an eye is quite common in such incidents.

Before going to Sitabani all I knew about bears was their reputation for attacking unprovoked, and the remembrance of this added to my uneasiness when going walks in that district. I was not particularly interested in seeing bear, even from the back of an elephant, since he climbs trees and there seemed no reason why he should not drop down on to the *katolah*, and to turn round to have a word with the forester and find a bear had joined the party would not be amusing, I felt. Apart from which bear does not stir the imagination like tiger.

We were certainly not looking for bear the thundery evening we set out in the car to 'have a look round', the elephants not yet having arrived from Churgallia. There was no rain that evening, but a continual roll of thunder, and flashes of forked lightning zigzagging down the low, heavy sky. Besides ourselves there was only the chauffeur, and our host had taken only his single-barrelled rifle.

We drove through the forests and down to the river-bed, where we all got out. We walked for a little among the big stones and then sat on a boulder to watch and listen. For a time nothing happened but the roll of thunder, the flash of lightning, the incessant chirp of crickets, and the forlorn call of a water-bird. Then suddenly, simultaneously, without speaking, and with that silence of movement one acquires on *shikar*, Jean on one side of me and our host on the other, got up. I saw Jean's lips form the single word: "Bear!" and she pointed, smiling a little, her eyes alight.

A black bear ambled across the river-bed, about a hundred yards distant.

Our host motioned us aside and stood up on the boulder. He, too, was smiling, and behind him stood that other *shikar* enthusiast, the chauffeur, also smiling and alert.

The bear which attacks unprovoked—what will it do if wounded?

There was the flash and crack of the gun—and the bear went down behind a boulder in the same instant. A moment later he was seen lolloping across the remaining stretch of river-bed and up the bank, where he disappeared into the bushes below the road.

The Chief hopped from one foot to the other in his chagrin.

"Oh, what bad luck! What rotten bad luck!"

If the bear hadn't ducked when it did, if he had had his double-barrelled rifle with him. . . .

Once over his disappointment, however, the Chief was inclined to be philosophic—there had been the excitement, and the bear that lives to get away may well be shot another day. The incident proved that there were bears about—and tomorrow the two elephants would arrive. And there must be tiger. Last year during the hot weather one called just below the bungalow every evening, and "When I shot it my wife would not forgive me, so much she enjoyed hearing it!"

We returned to the car and sat for a little while watching and listening, but there was only the thunder, and the small familiar night sounds of water-birds and crickets. No sambur—mercifully—called.

We drove back slowly, and the headlights of the car picked out a stag chital moving gracefully through the trees, quite unperturbed by the sound and the lights of the car. It turned its head and looked at us with its great gig-lamps of eyes, its antlers branching delicate and beautiful between the trees. The chauffeur murmured something.

The Chief smiled.

"He wants me to shoot it!"

"Oh no, no! *Please!*" we cried.

He laughed.

"It's all right. I don't want it. My wife would never forgive me. . . ."

He said something to the driver in which the word memsahib occurred, and we drove on.

The following afternoon when we were sitting on the verandah of the bungalow we suddenly heard a new and curious sound. It seemed to come from the nearest wooded hill.

"Good Lord," I exclaimed, "it sounds like a lawn-mower!"

"It sounds to me more like someone sawing wood. . . ."

A little later our host emerged from his office.

"Did you hear the panther sawing?" he inquired, eagerly, and looked across to the wooded hill.

We remembered, then, we had heard the expression about the 'sawing' of the panther.

We were joined by the Chief's assistant, who strongly recommended that we should take a walk up into that hill, for, he said, the view from the top was very fine.

"And," said our host, enthusiastically, "that's where the panther is!"

"That," I said, "is a very good reason for not going there."

"But you might *see* him!"

I abandoned the argument, but I dug my toes in about the walk. "No," I said, firmly, "I don't want to walk where *he* is."

I decided, also, that I was not going out on the elephant that evening. My nerve seemed to have gone. I was tired of feeling frightened, I declared, of being made to feel sick, of having nervous headaches. Why do *you* go, I demanded, you get frightened too. . . .

But I knew it was no use arguing about it. I knew the compulsion well enough. But for once my sick nerves had got the upper hand of the compulsion. Nevertheless I felt a little mean when I watched the party going down the slope from the terrace to the elephant-station—the Chief in his old leather jacket, beret at a jaunty angle—like a kind of Indian pirate, I often thought—his assistant, his chauffeur—a very dark-skinned moustached little man so like the *mahaout* they might have been brothers—carrying the guns, Jean in her bright blue jacket.

I stood watching them scramble up on to the *katolah*, and the elephant rise and move off into the woods below the bungalow. The hill of the panther was above them.

They seemed scarcely to have been gone five minutes before there was the sound of a shot. The servants ran across the compound to the edge of the terrace, peering down into the woods. I joined them. . . . I had glimpses of the elephant plunging about on a steep slope, and there was the gleam of a bright blue jacket. The servants were all very excited and pointing. The camp goat upon which we relied for milk had climbed up on to the top of the tree stump to which it was tethered and stood there quivering.

Back at the house my hostess said: "The servants say they saw the tiger. They say they saw its stripes. But it's more likely to have been the panther. It was up here last night, after our goat. They always go where there's goats or dogs. Shall we go for a walk?"

It was the last thing in the world I wanted to do. It was already growing dusk. But sometimes pride is stronger than sick nerves. I had defaulted twice that day, once over the proposed walk on the panther's hill, and then in refusing to go out on the elephant; I must somehow 'redeem' myself by doing this sundown walk. . . .

We went down the slope and past the elephant-station and followed a white dusty track across wide open country where during the daytime people worked cutting the high brown grass, weighing it in bales on primitive scales with big stones for weights. Now all the people were in their grass huts, or squatting beside their fires. The camp people, too, squatted round their fires outside tents and huts grouped round the ranger's house and the camp clerk's office.

We took an orderly with us. Some way along the road we met the chauffeur. He had been out looking for footprints to report to the sahib. More often than not he was out at dawn searching for them, in the sand of river-beds and the white dust of roads. The memsahib spoke to him and he handed the gun he was carrying to the orderly.

"As it's getting late to go for a walk he thinks we should have a gun with us."

"Can the orderly shoot?"

"He thinks he can!"

"But you can?"

"I did once shoot a tiger—from a *machan*."

Later I discovered that it was not something she cared to talk about. She had agreed to it to please her husband. She had been alone in the *machan*, and when she had dispatched one tiger immediately its mate came out. It had been a horrifying and unnerving first experience and she had not shot since.

The path entered some dark forest, and we followed it down to the river-bed where a few nights ago we had seen the bear. We walked along the road above the bank up which he had scrambled. There was no reason why we should not meet him again, I reflected, gloomily. It had been about this time we had seen him. I felt as sick as though I were on the elephant and the tiger calling.

On the way back two large boars came out from the darkness of the trees and crossed the road. When we reached the open space a couple of jackals slunk away. At one point there was a dreadful smell of a kill hidden in the undergrowth—an asphyxiating smell which lay like a tangible thing at the back of the throat. Across the river a sambur called. It called continuously. The night was thick with stars, but very dark, the moon not yet up. I kept thinking of the party on the elephant plunging about in that darkness looking for whatever beast it was that caused the sambur to give its warning so continuously. With all my heart I wished I had gone; far better to be sick with personal fear than with dread for someone close to you. I vowed that never again would I stay behind.

Back at the bungalow the lamps had been lit, and we sat by the fire, and I wrote in my journal:

Seven o'clock. The moon is not yet up and the hills and the valley are black. There is the warning bark of sambur and a crying of chital. Something is moving in the darkness. At the edge of the river there is the glow of fires outside the huts where all day men and boys sit making wooden pots on a wheel turned by the water. The prowling panther last night must have passed close to their flimsy shelters . . . and the panther attacks in the dark.

Seven-forty-five. The rim of the moon is just above the dark hulk of a hill. In the space of a few minutes the full great circle of it becomes visible, clear of the hills, low in the sky. In this country the moon comes up as rapidly and as theatrically as the sun. Clouds lie in long curling strata across the sky. There is a distant crying of voices up the river—a sound of shouting. There is no longer the belling of sambur or chital, only the crying of a night-bird. A long thin cloud lies across the moon.

Eight o'clock. There is a sound of voices approaching the bungalow. They are back!

They came in very pleased with their night's excitement. They had seen the panther at close range, looking down at them through the trees. They were astonished that I had not seen it, since, it seemed, it was only a few yards below me where I peered down. It must have been its spots which the servants had mistaken for the stripes of the tiger.

"Such a pretty thing," Jean said, "with its little cat-face!"

It was she who had seen it first, and had whispered to the Chief—who had passed the information on to the *mahaout*.

"The memsahib says she sees a panther."

But the *mahaout*, who did not see it, was impatient.

"She is mistaken, sahib. We won't waste our time here."

Then the sahib saw it for himself and halted the elephant, and fired. It bounded away unhit.

After which they had gone on down to the river looking for tiger. The shouting which had carried across the valley to the bungalow had been the *mahaout* giving his tiger call.

After that I was many times out on the elephant after sundown, plunging about in the river-beds and deep grass and dense jungle in the perpetual hunt for tiger. The attack of nerves passed—well, it passed sufficiently.

But it was not all taut nerves and fear. The jungle, like the excitement of being afraid, grows on one. Particularly the jungle in the evenings, when there is a warm curiously animal smell in the coarse high brown grass; it is the smell of the day's heat caught in its dryness, and of the animals concealed within it—the sambur, chital, wild boars. There is the smell of pungently scented leaves and blossoms. The warm grey smell of elephant. The smell of tiger-time. The sundown smell of danger, fear, and excitement.

In the evenings and the early morning there would be the thin quick tones of the bell from the beehive-like little temple half hidden among its banana and palm trees below the bungalow. At sundown from the river-bed would come the reedy notes of a flute as a herdsman piped the cattle home, to the safety of the compound, away from tiger and panther. There would be the voices of the half-naked men and boys lighting the fires outside their grass huts down by the river, and always the sound of the torrent, and the river-bird calling, and the crazy did-you-do-it-did-you-do-it of the brain-fever bird always more alive at night.

By day the silence in the forests is intense, not even a bird calling, unless the silence is broken by the monotonous knocking of the coppersmith bird, but even that is somehow part of the deep stillness. Walking the forests is unsatisfactory, for the straight rough tracks of the forest roads go on and on interminably; you must walk fifteen or twenty miles if you want to come to anywhere, and there are no footpaths through the trees as in English forests. Occasionally you come to a crossroads indicating the way to a village or a rest-house, but whichever direction you take the road is as long and straight and monotonous.

The jungle itself is alive with interest and variety, but except on an elephant it is almost impossible to penetrate it, since it is either dense, pathless undergrowth or a brown sea of grass anything from six to twelve feet high.

There was an evening when we went crashing through dense jungle in a fresh-water swamp area. Beside the swamps the trees were thin and grey, like ghosts of trees. Some of the trees in the very heart of the jungle are quite monstrous, like prehistoric beasts, or the most wildly imagined monsters of a macabre fairy-tale—nightmare trees like naked white bodies writhing aslant dense undergrowth, or over swamps, locked in obscene embrace, trees struggling to escape the parasite growths encompassing them and which finally destroy them, swallowing them as a python swallows its prey. Sometimes the original trunk of a tree will be barely visible through the twisting twining growths which have it in their grip, like great grey strangling arms. Many of these dreadful suckers reach the ground and take root and become fresh trees; they grow so thick they seem to be pillars supporting the branch from which they have descended.

The elephant sinks deeply into the swamps, and we are regaled with stories of how elephants can be so bogged they have to be dragged out with ropes. . . .

Once when the elephant cleaves a way through the undergrowth we see the skeleton of an animal lying, its bones picked clean of all flesh.

"A tiger's kill," observes our host.

"How d'you know it didn't die a natural death?"

"Don't you notice that two of its ribs are missing? If it had died naturally they would all be there, but the tiger eats bones and all."

When the *mahaout* considers that the elephant is not paying proper attention he gives it a crack over the head with an *ankos*, an iron spike like a boat-hook which rings on the massive skull like a hammer on an anvil. The first time we heard this ringing blow we were amazed that the elephant didn't collapse under it, but, in the simple words of our host, amused because we were so startled, "an elephant's skull is very hard."

Mahaouts love to decorate their elephants' heads; there is always a deep dark band of *ghee* (clarified butter) across the forehead; they maintain that it keeps the beast's head cool in hot weather, but they do it at all times of the year, and money-for-*ghee* appears to be the *mahaout's* 'perks'; if it is not forthcoming the elephant is mysteriously taken ill and is unfit for work. The *mahaout* then holds the winning card —no money for *ghee*, elephant becomes ill; whose is the fault, sahib? A *mahaout* of even the ordinary beater-elephants will decorate his beast's face with a 'make-up' of an elaborate design of leaves and flowers drawn in red; the make-up of a State elephant is of course even more elaborate, extending some way down the trunk.

We left Sitabani without having set eyes on a tiger, to our host's great disgust, and as he had not succeeded in killing either the panther or the bear which had presented themselves he was glad to be leaving, 'to break the spell'. His devoted *mahaout* and chauffeur, were also impatient to leave this unlucky place; they had become convinced that the sahib would never shoot a tiger here, and that once we got away his luck would change. He had only to kill a tiger in the next place for his whole *shikar* luck to change, the *mahaout* insisted. And in this he was proved right.

IV

DHIKALA; THE HAILEY PARK RESERVE

DHIKALA is only thirty-four miles from Sitabani, but the roads are such cart-tracks that it takes two and a half hours by car to make the journey. In the jungles any track along which a car can go is called 'a motor-road'. It is usually no more than a grassy track, rutted at the sides, and exists mainly for the convenience of contractors and forest-officers. Bare-footed forest-workers, both men and women, pass along it occasionally, and an occasional bullock-cart—and the tiger.

The road runs through endless forest land with dense undergrowth. When the road climbs there are hairpin bends which the narrowness and softness of the track make extremely dangerous. In the rainy season the forests are closed, the roads washed away. We climb precipitously above the usual wide stony boulder-strewn river-bed, in the middle of which the current flows brilliantly blue. There are people washing clothes in the usual Indian fashion, by slapping the wet garments on to boulders.

We pass through the village of Garjia, where the houses are all flimsy-looking affairs made of grass. There are a great many raw-boned cattle, mostly buffalo, and swarms of more than half-naked children. Women covered with bracelets and anklets and necklaces peep shyly from the dark doorways of the huts. After about two hours we enter the Hailey National Park, where shooting is prohibited, except in self-defence, in which case the trophy must be surrendered to the Government department with full particulars as to the time, place, and circumstances of the kill.

The Dhikala rest-house stands high above the very wide Ramganga river-bed which seems to be full of thin grey *shisham* trees. The river flows rapidly at one side of the river-bed; on the far side there are thickly wooded slopes, and in the distance blue hills. The landscape is not so beautiful as Sitabani; the hills are not so high, and the thin grey island trees give an air of desolation. Beyond the bungalow compound the elephant-grass stands high and brown, tinder-dry.

"The place is packed with tigers," says our host, and adds, ruefully, "But you may not shoot them!"

The Reserve is bounded by the river; unfortunately it is not possible to warn the tigers not to cross. . . .

We lunch with the Divisional Forest Officer, who is a Moslem, in a truly Arabian Night's tent—he has vacated the bungalow in order that the Chief and his entourage may move in. There is a kind of ante-chamber to the tent, which the D.F.O. clearly uses as an office; in the main body of the tent there are grill-like windows; there is blue drugget on the ground, chairs are ranged round a large dining-table laid with lace, cutlery, glasses, sweetpeas; there is a servants' entrance to another section of the tent; it is, in fact, a three-roomed affair. The meal is enormous—we had been told that 'Moslems keep a good table'—also that they were great meat-eaters, both of which statements are now borne out. At one point we have fish, meat, and poultry on our plates at the same time. The food is very heavily spiced, and even the vegetables are cooked with pieces of meat or fat to give them body. For some weeks now we have been aware that our skins exude the pungent spicy smell of the Indian food we have been eating so consistently. Until now our food has been strictly vegetarian, which has suited us better than these rich meat-meals, though, conveniently, we have no food-fads and can and do eat anything put before us—to the great relief of our Hindu and Moslem hostesses throughout the tour.

Our Moslem host of this occasion had provided us with cutlery, which he himself used, but the rest of the party ate with their fingers, a custom with which we complied when occasion demanded, but with which we could not feel at ease. It is not etiquette to get the fingers soiled with the food above the knuckle, and it is very improper to touch food with the left hand—which is the 'unclean' member of the human body in India, since it serves the purposes of hygiene; this 'untouchable', therefore, is kept firmly out of sight throughout the meal. At the end of the meal—sometimes in the middle of it—the guests adjourn for the washing of the right hand. This washing is usually done on the verandah of the bungalow; a servant pours water over your hand into a brass bowl—all washing in India is done under running water; anything else is considered unhygienic.

The vast meal over, we go out into the compound and sit in the shade under a large banyan tree from which the large leathery leaves fall continually with a small metallic sound to the dry ground. A servant sweeps them up with the bunch of twigs tied together which serves as a broom for all purposes all over India. These bunches of twigs are used for sweeping roads, public parks, household floors, cleaning out train-toilets, sweeping platforms, sweeping up gardens; the user must bend to sweep and he can only cover a very small area at a time. Watching a sweeper using one of these ineffective articles, one feels like organising a Brooms-for-India campaign on the spot.

Our host inquires about the possibilities of tiger on the other side of the river. The D.F.O. tells him there is a tiger's kill out in the open on the other side, under a tree. . . .

In the late afternoon two elephants are got ready.

The elephants here are bigger, and elaborately 'made-up', their foreheads deeply darkened, and with red markings on their enormous flaps of ears. Tomorrow the Chief's own elephants will arrive from Sitabani. He will never be happy on any elephant but Lightning, or with any *mahaout* but his favourite. Even we feel the strangeness of a new elephant.

The flies are terrible here; they rise in a black cloud from the elephant as we climb up over her rump into the *katolah*, and swarm thickly round the *mahaout*. On one elephant rides the D.F.O. and his two orderlies, and the Chief's assistant; on the other, which leads the way, ourselves and the Chief, and his chauffeur.

We descend the steep slope below the bungalow, and down another steep slope into the river-bed and wade across a wide swift-flowing current on to the broad sandy stretch of dry land between it and a similar strong stream on the other side. We pass through a wood of grey *shisham* trees—in a fortnight they will be green, we are assured—where there are the grass huts of grass-cutters and forest-workers, cross another river-bed, and climb up to a lumber-camp at the top of the bank. Here there are more grass-huts, haycocks hung in the trees, herds of buffalo, stacks of timber, brown faces watching us from doorways.

Beyond the timber-camp there is a plain of brown grass flowing away to a wooded ridge—a good lying-up place for tiger. Beyond the ridge distant blue hills, fold upon fold, are visible.

The wild landscape is held in the deep amber light of late afternoon—everything, the brown grass, the tawny light, the narrow stripes of the bare shisham trees, is the colour of tiger.

We leave the lumber-camp behind and turn off the track and plunge into the high grass. There is some difference of opinion as to whether we should beat the grass in the vicinity of the kill, or cross the stream on the far side and enter the woods, where the Chief is convinced the tiger must be hanging about within a few yards of the kill. The day is still hot and he will certainly have sought the shade. Also tigers like high ground, as it affords them a look-out. We pass a collection of grass-huts and a villager comes running out. He has news of the tiger for the sahib. The tiger is a cattle-lifter; and his is the dead buffalo lying half-eaten under the tree. The sahib has him come up on to the elephant with us. He brings with him a smell which half suffocates us, but it seems more like a smell of something he has been cooking than a body smell. He is a thin little man and his *dhoti* is in rags.

We plough on through the high grass and find pug-marks in the sand of a gulley. We cross the gulley and re-enter the sea of grass, and come to another dried-up river. In the sand here are more pug-marks. We plunge about in the river-bed till the light begins to go. The other elephant is now very far behind.

There seems to be some argument between the villager and the Chief, who seems a little annoyed. Finally he turns to us: he says in a tone of suppressed irritation, "It's no use getting angry with these people. Then you only frighten them and they won't tell you anything!"

His tone when he resumes conversation with the villager is milder.

We cross a *nullah* and follow what seems an interminable track through the jungle. Whilst we have been plunging about this way and that, looking for footprints, in the river-bed and the *nullah*, the other elephant has caught up with us, so now we travel in procession. The tropical darkness closes in quickly, and in the denseness of the trees it is quite dark even when a grey light lingers outside. The Chief fits an electric torch to his rifle and begins flashing it to right and left. Chital look at us from the undergrowth, but nothing calls—and we go on and on and on. Our backs ache, the air grows cold, and it is very dark. The moon will not be up till half-past nine.

After a very long time we turn back; but now in the black darkness we get off the track and plunge about in the jungle density, and it is soon apparent that we are once more lost in the jungle, but this time no one is amused. We are all tired—and bored. Once again we seek out the stars through a gap in the tree-tops and plough on, keeping Orion on our right. After a time, however, Orion is not where he should be, for our purpose, and we do not come to the *nullah*, which we must cross at some point if we are travelling in the right direction. This crashing about in the darkness becomes excessively irritating, and it must be much worse for the party behind, for we at least have the electric torch with which to see sufficiently to be able to dodge branches. Occasionally we call out a warning of a branch to the others and flash the torch upon it. And we go on and on and on.

There seems no reason why we should not go on till daybreak crashing through the pitch-black jungle—or until the electric torch gives out. There is no agreement among us as to our position. The Chief's assistant thinks we are 'too far over' according to Orion; our host does not agree, and the D.F.O. has a different opinion from either. I would have thought the Assistant was right, but Jean agrees with the Chief. The only thing upon which we are unanimous is that we are utterly lost. And this time we have no jungle-wise forester to extricate us. The Assistant is of the opinion that we should give it up, get down from the elephants—we all have acute backache by now—light fires, and wait for daylight, which is the recognised procedure when lost in the jungle. The Chief says nonsense, if you go on long enough you are bound to come to somewhere—which is logical only provided you don't go round in circles, which is what we appear to be doing.

Finally the villager weighs in with some suggestions, the Chief says a word to the *mahaout*, the elephant kneels, and the little man slides down over the beast's rump. The elephant rises again. The villager goes here and there among the undergrowth, searching by the light of the torch directed along the rifle from the *katolah*. It is evident that there is no track, but it seems he is not looking for a track, but for signs of grass which his bullocks have carried in bales through the jungle that morning.

It seems incredible that in that dim light he should find what he is looking for; to us it seems very much like looking for a needle in a haystack, but incredibly he does find the signs of grass, and he leads the way. We come to the *nullah*; we cross it and come to the river-bed where we found the pug-marks, though we cross both *nullah* and river-bed much higher up than on the outward journey. The little man, following his flimsy signs—wisps of grass adhering to bushes—brings us out at least into the open of the grass-land. To us the whole thing seems miraculous.

We get back at last to the collection of huts near the lumber-camp and here our guide gives us *Salaam* and leaves us. Fires have been lighted now outside the huts here and at the camp, and squatting brown figures can be picked out in the red glow. There is the tinkle of a bell as a buffalo moves about in the darkness. It is a great relief to be again in the open.

The stars are thick now, and very bright—that tropical brilliance which makes them seem curiously near. There are big fires outside the huts in the *shisham* woods, and I exclaim upon them. Our host, who is in a good mood despite the fact that we have had neither sight nor sound of tiger, asks, quizzically, "What would you think if when we got up to the huts you found there was no fire there?"

I replied: "I should seek for some rational explanation. I have," I added, "an open mind concerning the supernatural, but my tendency is towards scepticism."

He laughed. "I'll tell you a story."

"I had dined out," he said, "and I left my host's house late. I had been brought to the house by car, but the friend who had brought me had gone earlier. I had not intended to stay so late, but we were talking and the time passed. When I finally rose to go my host gave me a lantern, as part of my way lay through a forest, and there was no moon that night.

"I set out with the lantern, but I had not gone far before it gave out—my host had not thought to add more oil to it, and we had been burning it all night. It is not pleasant walking in a forest in the darkness in tiger and panther country with no light of any kind, but there was nothing to do but go on.

"Soon I made out a dim white figure ahead of me, and very much cheered at the prospect of company on this dark and lonely walk I called out a greeting. He did not reply but turned round and waved me on. I called to him to wait for me, but he merely waved me on again, without turning round, or speaking.

"I never did catch up with him, though I hurried. I followed his whiteness right through the wood, and then I called to him again, but he disappeared in the darkness—there was no longer the glimmer of his garments.

"I got home safely, but very much puzzled. It seemed such strange conduct. When I next saw my host and told him of the episode he became very excited. Then he told me what he had been reluctant to tell me at the time—which was that that forest was full of corpses of Ghurkas who had fallen there in a battle many years ago."

I smiled.

"So you think the beckoning figure was a spirit of one of the dead?"

He shrugged. "Give what explanation you like. I merely tell the story."

The weather was beginning to be hot now about mid-day, and in the afternoons a wind always sprang up, with dust-storms which clouded the atmosphere like a mist.

We began going out on the elephant night and morning with the D.F.O., without guns, and keeping to the Reserve. The D.F.O. had shot tiger and panther in his time, but had no particular enthusiasm for it now, and was sympathetic to our idea of tiger-stalking purely for the purpose of shooting with the camera if possible. We were now in Mr. F. W. Champion's tiger country and his name came often into the conversation, just as Jim Corbett's had at Churgallia. There was an old *mahaout*, turbaned, bearded, a sweet-faced old man, who urged that we should go at mid-day to a spot where, he said, Mr. Champion had often set his flashlight and camera.

The idea of a mid-day elephant-beat was new to us, but as we had failed on the morning and evening rides, there seemed reason to try this innovation. We scoured a large tract of high grass and plunged about in some very lush and steamy jungles, and continually the *mahaout* observed, ruefully, that it was 'ideal cover for tiger', but still we did not see anything, except the occasional imprint of a heavy body in the grass and occasional pug-marks in sandy gulleys, but nothing which could be followed up.

The D.F.O. proposed a car-ride in the evening to Boksar—subject to the Chief's consent—which he said was 'good tiger country'. But, so strangely does Fate work—tea was late that afternoon, because the Chief was busy in his office, and by the time it was over the light was going and it was obviously too late to start out for Boksar. Therefore instead of a car an elephant was brought round for us.

We went out without guns, because our intention was to keep to the Reserve, and without a camera because it was already five-thirty and the light going. Less than five minutes from the bungalow we saw the tiger strolling along the road ahead of us. We all fell silent in the excited moment of realisation; the *mahaout* quickened the elephant's pace and brought her along silently, but we could not move so silently that at a couple of hundred yards distant a tiger could not hear. He glanced round over his shoulder, paused for a moment, then, unhurried, turned into the long grass at the side of the track.

When we reached the forest cross-roads there was no sign of him, but we turned right because he had turned right, and a few yards along we suddenly saw him standing in the long grass about fifteen feet away, regarding us intently. The *mahaout* halted the elephant and we returned his gaze, with fast beating hearts. He was a large and handsome male, with strong clear stripes. The D.F.O. brought his arm up into the position of holding a rifle, and smiled. "A dead shot," he whispered—a little ruefully.

Jean could only lament—"And we've no camera!"

"The light's not good enough."

"We'd have got something!"

Never the time and the tiger and the camera all together. . . .

When the tiger had satisfied his curiosity he moved deeper into the grass and was lost to sight.

The D.F.O. looked inquiringly at us.

"Want to see more of him?"

We nodded. Who would not wish to see more of that noble beauty?

The *mahaout* turned the elephant off the road in the direction the tiger had gone and we were engulfed in the high grass. We moved about for a little, when suddenly Jean laid a hand on the arm of the D.F.O. and pointed. For a few moments our eyes searched in vain, but it was literally a case of not being able to see for looking, because we were all searching too far afield; *the tiger was crouching in the grass within a few feet of us*. He stared intently at the elephant, then, as we watched, lowered himself—as a cat lowers itself on its belly, preparatory to springing. . . .

The D.F.O. expressed our own feeling when he said:

"Perhaps we'd better move off—we don't want to irritate the creature. . . ."

Afterwards we thought that the tiger had merely lowered himself in the grass to get out of our sight, but we had no guns and there was no point in taking unnecessary risks. We had had our *darshan* of the beautiful and truly regal king of the jungle.

Back at the bungalow our host, after listening with lively interest to our excited story of the encounter, observed, "It is always like that—you have either to work very hard for your tiger, or he is just round the corner!"

The following day was hot and sultry. We went down to the river-bed and watched an elephant being scrubbed, with loud cries and shrill commands from the handsome young man clad only in a loin-cloth who was doing the job, and then spent some time trying to photograph vultures flocking round a dead buffalo calf in mid-stream. They sat like Poe's raven, forever spreading their great black wings and never taking-off, bloated, obscene, monstrous things. A good deal of cattle-lifting by tigers goes on along the river-bed and it was a place to look for pug-marks.

We crossed the river and passed through the lumber-camp, where men sat about outside the huts smoking their big pipes, which rest on the ground and look more like some kind of musical instrument than smoking apparatus. We took some pictures of the haystacks hanging in the trees, like great bees' nests, and then followed the track out through the camp, through a waste of coarse grass and scrub, and walked for a time under a wooded hill.

At the base of a stony gulley running down through the trees, we stopped and listened; but there was nothing but the deep, deep birdless silence of the jungle, not even the kok-kok of the copper-smith bird; nothing but the small noiseless noise of crickets and the dry crackling of the brown grass in the heat. Yet how the slightest movement in that high, dry grass can set dread leaping in the blood—the fear that goes everywhere with one in the jungle; the fear in which the sambur and chital live.

I looked up the *nullah*.

" 'Good lying-up cover for tiger'," I quoted, uneasily. "*Chalo!*" (Approximately, 'Let's go!')

Something happened in that *nullah* in the evening.

In the afternoon we drove to Boksar. There was an endless procession of hill-people on the road, coming from market with sacks balanced on their heads containing their rations of flour, pulse, lentils. Many carried bundles of brightly coloured quilts, rolls of bedding, and big earthenware pots. The amount an Indian villager, man or woman, can carry on the head has to be seen to be believed. Though this also applies to the coolies on the railway stations.

At the Boksar rest-house we picked up the elephant and went down to the river looking for crocodile. The D.F.O. insisted that the long brown blobs we could see on the far side of the river were crocodile, but we were not convinced, neither was the Chief's Assistant who accompanied us. We examined the bridge across the river with some interest; we had seen several like it, but this one happened to be a remarkably good specimen. These bridges have to be renewed every year after the monsoons, when the heavy rains sweep them away. They are primitively fashioned of layers of bamboo laid on trestles bolstered up with boulders and covered with earth. They look extraordinarily flimsy, but they serve for a season though they will not take the weight of elephants.

We left the river and toured around in 'likely' country abounding in good lying-up places and cover for tiger, but not a stripe did we see, though we saw plenty of everything else—chital, sambur, hog-deer, wild boars, peacocks—which rise with a great clatter of wings and somehow look out of place perched in trees, their splendid shimmering tails trailing.

We examined some disused weaver-birds' nests hanging from a tree. This bird builds itself a bag-shaped nest of intricately woven grass.

The nest is divided into two parts and is entered from underneath, which, said the D.F.O., affords protection against theft for its eggs. He also said that the weaver-bird 'lights' his nest by dropping a glow-worm into it.

Tiger-stalking easily gets a hold on one—or so it seems, for despite the afternoon on the elephant we went out again in the evening. We beat a strip of dense wood where the afternoon previously we had heard a sambur bark and had found pug-marks. But we disturbed nothing but jungle fowl—so unsuitably domestic-looking in the jungle, as though they had strayed from some English farmyard or back garden—and a couple of porcupines. A number of trees, we noticed, had been badly damaged by these pestiferous rodents which eat the bark, thereby preventing the sap rising, so that the tree eventually dies. They are very fast-moving and are rarely seen. As a pest they should be shot, but we had no gun with us. Their quills, the D.F.O. said, are a menace even to elephants.

An hour after we were back at the bungalow a servant came running with the news that the sahib had shot a tiger! There was a general exodus from the bungalow—our hostess and ourselves, the D.F.O. and his wife who had come in for supper, and the servants. Lanterns were taken out, and when the elephant reached the verandah the *mahaout* had it kneel and lanterns were held up so that everyone could see the black and yellow beast tied by its feet to the back of the *katolah*, its head lolling. It was a young tigress; she was shot in the *nullah* we had visited that morning. She had not seen the elephant approach; she had been standing looking the other way, her flank exposed, and she had taken a shot through the heart . . . all in the golden evening.

Her slayer, who had scrambled down from the elephant, stood looking down at her with pride as he recounted the story of her death. He touched the hole in her golden side where the bullet had gone in, and immediately blood spurted out.

"It's a very pretty skin," he said. He was excited because his run of bad luck had broken at last. By his side stood his faithful *shikar* colleague, his chauffeur, as excited as the sahib and the *mahaout*. The servants and the camp people were excited too. Everyone was excited except ourselves—and our hostess.

All she said, impatiently, as she turned away, a moth-like figure in the lantern light in her white *sari*, was "What a waste of time!"

For ourselves we could feel only sadness—and bewilderment. Something young and beautiful and innocent had been destroyed. All that lovely sinuousness of movement had been stilled, all that power and grace quenched; what had been warm and alive and vital was now so much dead meat. Soon it would be a mere carcase, stripped of its black and gold hide, which would hang upon a wall or lie upon a floor to collect dust and moths—one more trophy of *shikari* skill, one more token of man's capacity to destroy.

We felt depressed. It would have been different if it had been a man-eater, whose power and vitality were a menace, and whose beauty must therefore be discounted. But this pretty young thing was innocent. Wherein lay the sport of shooting something which presented so easy a target? Stalking a wild beast is exciting, but when you have caught up with it how is the excitement increased by killing it when it stands to be shot at and hasn't even seen you? What is behind the blood-lust in man? It all seems so futile and pointless. There was no danger involved in shooting that tigress, and not even skill was required. . . .

There had been two tigers in that *nullah*, it seemed, the other one a male. The carcase of the tigress would be put down tomorrow to bait the male. . . . It is probably the sheerest sentimentality to find this idea revolting; we could not anyhow have been more depressed by the whole business than we were.

In the morning, early, an orderly brought Jean a memo from the Chief: "If you want to photograph the dead tiger you must do so immediately, as it is about to be skinned." With the bitter reflection that having failed in the opportunity to photograph a live tiger she might as well photograph the dead one, she went off to the elephant-station.

Later I went along myself. There was a pool of blood where the tigress had been lying. She looked, now, merely like a carcase in a butcher's shop, her head severed. We stood watching for a bit, then, "Come," said our host, and we went over to where Lightning waited, with the D.F.O. We crashed about for an hour or so in dense jungle without seeing anything. In the evening we went out again with the D.F.O. on one of his elephants, whilst the Chief went off on Lightning in another direction to look for the pretty young tigress's mate. We followed up some fresh footprints we had found when walking in the afternoon, but saw and heard nothing.

Our host also returned disappointed; there had been a tiger a hundred yards ahead of him, but he had been unable to catch up with it, owing to the slowness of the elephant. He was as depressed as last night he had been elated.

But the next evening he got the male tiger in the *nullah*, and two days later a man-eater that had killed a woman. He brought the remains of the woman and her slayer home together on the same elephant, and asked the husband's permission to take the ring from her finger as a souvenir. His luck was in again. But by then we had left Dhikala, for, as he himself said, for us 'the show was over'. . . .

Grass-cutters' children, Sitabani

V

RAMNAGAR, JUNGLE TOWN

THE thirty miles from Dhikala to Ramnagar took two and a half hours to accomplish by car, along roads so rough you bounce from the seat to the roof of the car, and in places so narrow that they seem mere ledges, so that the numerous hair-pin bends threaten to become death-traps. There are a number of wide bouldery river-beds to be negotiated, and stretches of road with steep banks of soft muddy earth at one side and a precipitous drop on the other, the whole track landslide-soft from heavy rains.

The *mahaout* accompanied us in the car; he looked awkward and uncomfortable crouching on a front seat, his slight narrow body hunched up over his thin legs in their tight white trousers. In the front of the car, between the Chief and the driver, were the familiar double-barrelled and single-bore rifles. At one point the Chief and his *mahaout* and the chauffeur got out of the car and examined pug-marks in a *nullah* running down through the woods to the Ramganga river. A tiger so rash as to follow that *nullah* down to the river-bed, and to continue on across the river-bed—as drawn by the smell of a dead sambur kill he well might—would find himself on the other side, out of the protection of the Reserve. It has been suggested that it should not be allowed to set bait within three miles of the boundary of a Reserve.

As we neared the town we passed men and women working on the roads, the women carrying stones and cement in baskets on their heads, or kneeling in the dust and, fantastically, putting down the small flints for the re-making of the roads one at a time with their fine braceleted hands. The sheer inefficiency of Indian methods of work never failed to impress us.

Our host and his assistant had a conference to attend at the Ramnagar forest rest-house, what time we sat in the compound and chatted with the D.F.O.'s wife, a very charming Hindu lady educated at Roedean. When, after a tea consisting of roasted nuts and crisp fried rice and the most delicious sweetmeats and cakes, it was time to say goodbye to the Chief we felt a curiously deep sadness. We owed the whole jungle experience to him, and though we could not endorse his enthusiasm for *shikar*, to it we owed all those mornings and evenings on the elephant, reaching depths of the jungles we could have penetrated in no other way. To him we owed a great knowledge of the tiger and its habits. When, thanking him, I said we both felt we now knew 'a good deal' about the tiger, he said, "You know all there is to know!"

Typical bridge, near Boksar, United Provinces jungles
Lumber-camp, Dhikala, United Provinces jungles

One of the things he taught us was that it is not the paradox it seems to love the tiger and yet shoot it. That this man loves what he himself calls 'that great splendid beast' there can be no doubting, and he never loves it so intensely as when it lies dead at his feet. It is not so inexplicable. It is not merely that 'all men kill the thing they love'; it can also be explained in terms of male possessiveness, the desire to conquer, the power-instinct. The tiger's beauty and strength can represent a challenge to a man no less than a woman's beauty and weakness.

When we saw the blood running out of the hole in the side of the limp dead body of the young tigress we could feel only the futility of that act of destruction. It is futile; but, if it comes to that, so is the act of love. A man spends his strength and power upon the body of the desired woman, and for the time being destroys himself and her in *le petit mort*, and is no nearer to possessing her essential essence. He returns, again and again to the pursuit, of the same woman or another; each time it is the same but different, just as the story of one tiger is the story of all, yet every tiger is its own story. Behind all our grieving when something beautiful and innocent was killed there was this knowledge, this understanding—and infinite regret.

Because there was so much to say we had few words—and because in every parting a little of oneself dies.

"We can never begin to thank you——"

"I enjoyed having you both."

"Perhaps we'll meet again one day——"

"Who knows?"

"*Salaam!*"

"*Salaam!*"

An orderly holds the car door open; the Chief moves the guns aside and climbs in, followed by the *mahaout*. The sun is going down, and with luck the tiger walks the *nullah* once more; with luck he follows it down to the river-bed and crosses over. At some point on the return journey they will pick up the elephant, or why has the favourite *mahaout* made this journey to Ramnagar, and why the guns? But one doesn't ask questions; it is another of the things we have learned. . . .

The knocking of the copper-smith bird goes endlessly on; the sky is full of a golden light and holds the warmth of the day. Beyond the compound, and below it, there is the river-bed, and beyond that the forests. There is the sundown smell of dry grass, warm stones, and earth that has all day absorbed hot sun; the smell of tiger-time. . . .

Orderlies salute the car as it passes out of the gates, and we turn away and retrace our steps across the compound to the bungalow.

Our new hosts propose a walk. They want to show us the garden from which all the sweet-peas and fresh fruits—the guavas and bananas and papayas—have been supplied daily to Dhikala. They are a little surprised when we say that this would be interesting but that we would also like to see the town, particularly we add, the bazaar. . . .

"It is very dirty," they warn us.

We assure them that we do not mind, that we have walked all over old Delhi, and in the bazaar at Haldwani; we are quite used to flies and smells and garbage-strewn gutters and poverty indescribable.

Ramnagar is a makeshift of a town; its main street reminds one of those main streets of gold-rush towns in Wild West films. There are shabby wooden houses with balconies, shoddy shops, and a ramshackle wooden cinema with a string of fairy-lights outside offering a tawdry gaiety. There are the usual wretched shacks put up by refugees, and there is an enclosure where seasonal workers camp in tents, cooking their meals on fires in the open. Bullock-carts lumber along through the dust of the road, and there is an incessant movement of white-clad crowds on the broken pavements.

Behind the main street there is the bazaar, with its brass-market, its cloth market, its fruit and vegetable market, and the usual open-fronted shops buzzing with flies. The narrow streets, swarm with people, there is the usual dung and garbage, the usual repulsive beggars, the usual figures squatting beside baskets of nuts and *pan* and cubes of cane-sugar. There are bullock-carts and raw-boned wandering cows and stray starving dogs.

Our hostess in silk *sari* and dainty sandals picks her way with obvious distaste through the filth. It is clear that but for us she would not dream of setting foot in this quarter.

"It is a pity our people are so dirty," she sighs.

I suggest that in such extreme poverty it is difficult to be otherwise, and we discuss the need for education—which shall include a knowledge of hygiene—better housing conditions, and the complexity and magnitude of India's social problems.

We come to the forest department garden, which is fall of guava trees and banana trees and papaya trees and dark-leaved mangoes. We walk along narrow paths above ditches which serve for irrigation. In the middle of the garden, surrounded by tall date palms, there is a dark little wooden house where the gardener and his family live. Small brown pot-bellied children run out to peep at us, and a young girl in a white *sari*, and carrying the inevitable baby—her mother's youngest—on her hip, peeps at us from a doorway. She has bangles on both arms and ankles, and ornate necklaces and ear-rings. We give her *Salaam* and she smiles shyly.

The papaya looks like a small melon and grows on short bushy trees with big deeply serrated leaves, grey-green against the broad shining yellow-green of the banana leaves which flow like green lengths of silk—and which, indeed, when cut into squares or oblongs make excellent plates, which have the immense advantage of not needing to be washed-up, but can be thrown away and fresh ones gathered for each meal.

There are sweet-smelling shrubs whose names we do not know, and a smell of jasmine on the air. The only familiar things in the garden are the little 'fences' of multi-coloured sweet-peas. Sweet-peas in February seems something marvellous, but anything can be expected of a country in which the chrysanthemums and roses bloom at the same time, and when one lot of trees loses its leaves whilst another lot breaks into spring-green; when winter is the green and pleasant season, and summer the brown and leafless time.

Two old men wearing the forest service turbans squat in the middle of the garden making up bunches of sweet-peas and baskets of fruit and vegetables to be sent to the rest-house at Dhikala in the morning. They rise and *salaam* as we approach, and one of them presents the two European memsahibs with a posy each. Their faces break into smiles of pleasure when we bring out '*Shukria*' from our rag-bag of Hindustani words and phrases.

We leave the garden and follow a dusty track beside a dried-up canal. An enormous white sacred bull stands at a street-corner sombrely chewing the cud. We skirt the edge of a forest and by a circular route re-enter the town which, golden when we left, is now blue-grey with the swift dusk. The brain-fever bird calls wildly, and with no word spoken between us each knows that the other is thinking of an elephant called Lightning picking her silent delicate way through the boulders of a river-bed, or moving like a great grey ship through the deep brown sea of grass as high as herself, or crashing through the dense jungle where rope-like suckers swing from branches, and grey-white tree-trunks like naked bodies writhe together in interminable embrace; and a sambur calls its sharp warning note, and monkeys chatter frightened in the tree-tops, and there comes the deep melancholy *ah-humm* of the tiger. 'I, the tiger, walk alone, *come*, *come*. . . .'

Shall we ever get the sun-down jungle excitement out of our blood? We do not think so. For the time being 'the show is over'; but only for the time being.

We spent the greater part of the night in the train on Ramnagar station. The station was in black darkness when we arrived, and it was difficult not to trip over the bodies lying about sleeping on the platform. It was necessary to turn out of our compartment some vagrants who proposed to doss down there till five in the morning when the train left for Moradabad. The compartment was in a filthy condition, and we had a disturbed night because people came continually and banged and rattled furiously, with angry shouting, at our locked door. But finally when I went to the barred window with a torch and they beheld a memsahib they went away and left us in peace.

At five when the train started the lights came on—and so did the flies, which had been dormant in the darkness. There were black buzzing swarms of them, making sleep impossible.

I had my first of several attacks of revulsion against India on that train. I recorded in my journal, 'This squalid filthy beautiful country —I never want to see it again!'

We reached Moradabad about ten-thirty in the morning, breakfasted on the station European-style, and made our toilets Indian-style. We appeared to be the only Europeans and were much stared at. With some time on our hands before the next train we decided to have a look at the town.

We had time, however, to traverse only the very long street up from the station, which is a quite dreadful place stinking of garbage and of the greasy foods cooked in booths at the sides of the road, the flies swarming black over everything. Some of the keepers of stalls and booths employ small boys to squat beside baskets and trays of food stuffs and wave a paper fan to keep off the flies. Where there is no one so employed the flies are so thick that it is impossible to see what it is they cover. The *tonga* ponies (the *tonga* is a small two-wheeled trap with a hood over, in which the passengers sit back to the driver) in Delhi are thin enough, but in Moradabad they were living skeletons, many of them badly lame, and often covered with fly-infested sores on their flanks and knees. Their spines were sharp ridges along their fleshless backs. Many of them looked as though they could hardly stand. Only in a bullring have I seen such miserable horses. Nothing would have induced us to travel in a *tonga* drawn by such wretched creatures.

The day was hot, and between the heat and the flies and the smells and the squalor, we were glad to get back to the station, though there we did not escape the flies—or the sight of starving stray dogs which seem to infest the streets of all Indian cities and which haunt the railway stations, scavenging along the tracks, or standing miserably on the platforms. Many of these miserable creatures, like the *tonga* ponies, are so weak they appear hardly able to stand. India is no country for the animal-lover—though the mass of people are as starved-looking and uncared for as the wretched animals. I am not suggesting that the Indian *tonga* driver is wilfully cruel to his pony; it is simply that the animal shares, perforce, his master's own semi-starvation.

But if India is no country for the animal-lover, it is also no country for anyone sensitive to human suffering, and I am of those who, whilst feeling strongly for animals, consider human beings to be more important.

In a hot and crowded train back to Delhi all kinds and conditions of human beings bundled into our second-class compartment, and we arrived in the evening dirty and exhausted, but with the self-righteous reflection that we had anyhow more staying power than Mr. Aldous Huxley, who records in his *Jesting Pilate* that he travelled second-class for only a few hours, after which he weakly transferred to first-class. Mr. Huxley objected to the smell of crowded humanity, and to the hawking and spitting which is a characteristic of the Indian male masses. We also disliked the hawking and spitting; at times, indeed, it was insufferable—along with much else. But perhaps because we ate the same food and exuded the spicy smell of it from our pores we were unaware of any body-odours in our fellow-travellers. We were ourselves, in short, in the process of becoming Indianised—even to our colouring. It can be said that India is no country for the fastidious, but on the other hand Indians are possessed of a fastidiousness concerning their food and toilet which to European notions seems quite fantastic. The European, squeamish among the Indian masses, does well to remember that in that country he is himself, to the orthodox Hindu, an 'untouchable'. . . .

Part III

EAST PUNJAB TO WEST BENGAL

I

EAST PUNJAB; AMRITSAR AND BATALA

An English friend, married to a Christian Indian, urged that on the way to Peshawar we should break the journey at Batala and visit her, and from there, she said, we could go to Amritsar, only a few hours distant, and see the Golden Temple of the Sikhs, which had not, so far as she knew, been destroyed in the Hindu-Moslem riots, though much of Amritsar had been.

Amritsar! Hitherto the name had always been associated with the massacre which took place there in 1919, under General Dyer's orders, when he ordered his troops to fire on a crowd in a public park with only one entrance, to teach the Indians, as he himself put it, 'not to be wicked'. As Aldous Huxley observed[1] after he had inspected the Jalianwala Bagh, it was 'a bad place for a crowd to be caught and fired on with machine-guns. One could kill more people here, and in a shorter time, than in most plots of ground of equal area. General Dyer proved it experimentally.' At the Commission of Enquiry, when the atrocity was belatedly officially admitted, Dyer acknowledged that it was a 'horrible act', but considered that it 'did a jolly lot of good' inasmuch as it averted a revolution. The jolly lot of good killed 379 people and wounded 1200, according to the Commission's figures, but in India this is considered an underestimate.

It will always be as impossible to dissociate Amritsar from that act of terrorism under the British Raj as to dissociate Munich from the 1938 crisis and Mr. Chamberlain's effort with his umbrella and the 'nettle danger'. Would the Golden Temple, I wondered, as the train trundled along between the February orchards white with blossom, would the Golden Temple have power to evoke more than horror in the word 'Amritsar'? Aldous Huxley found this exceedingly sacred stronghold of the Sikhs 'architecturally less than nothing', as he picked his way 'gingerly' barefoot among 'the bird-droppings, and expectorated betel that strew the causeway'. We also picked our way gingerly, but not from squeamishness, but because the stones under our bare feet were so hot that they burned. We had a little difficulty, too, because whilst being required to bare our feet we were also required to cover our heads, and for this we were not equipped. We had also to part with the precious camera. . . .

The temple stands at the end of a causeway which projects far out into a 'tank'—an artificial lake whose waters are sacred and believed to possess healing power. It is from this tank, Amrit Saras, Pool of Immortality, that the town derives its name. The temple is golden inside and out. Its domes are copper covered with gold foil. Inside, the walls are a mosaic of gold and silver, and red stones, and pieces of glass. There are gold-framed mirrors everywhere, and exquisite oriental carpets. The place is rich and golden and sparkling from floor to ceiling, incredibly lavish, like something out of a dream of the Arabian Nights.

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[1] In *Jesting Pilate.*

On the day of our visit there was a great crowd of people circulating round a railed-off altar enclosure, in which was a great mound of flowers, and also a mound of coins. Behind the flowers and coins squatted musicians and singers; one beat with his hand upon a long drum, another played an accordion; it sounded gay, and not at all holy. By the rail there was a distribution of *prasad*; people threw in coins—of the smallest denomination, it was to be observed—and then thrust in a hand and received the morsel of sacred wafer from the priest.

Our presence caused a good deal of sensation, but we were beginning to become accustomed to being stared at; we threw in our coins but did not take the *prasad*, and then followed the crowd through the temple and down some steps to the sacred water, where people dipped in their hands and drank. We were for merely looking and leaving, but a woman indicated that we should take the holy water, and we accordingly bent down and moistened our lips. Sacred or not it did not look to our European eyes like the kind of water one drank. . . .

We returned to the interior of the temple and to escape the crowd climbed some steep narrow stairs, at the top of which a series of rooms opened off a balcony. In one of the rooms a priest sat cross-legged on the floor reading from an enormous parchment-leaved book, the Granth, the Sikh Bible. In alcoves turbaned figures knelt or squatted in prayer or contemplation. Down below the crowd moved in a continual procession past the railing, and old men sang and a young man beat with slender brown hands on the oblong drum.

It was curious to reflect that all this lavishness and ritual originated in the quietism of the simple saintly Guru Nanak, who rejected all such outward show and founded Sikhism as a break-away from Brahmanical Hinduism with its rigid caste restrictions. Nanak rejected racialism as he rejected caste; he maintained that there was 'no Hindu and no Mussalman', that man shall be saved by his work alone, and that God will not ask a man his tribe or sect, but what he has done. Nanak believed that religion should unite all men, because ultimately for Hindu and Moslem alike there was but one God, and he preached unity between Hinduism and Islam.

Yet today as viciously as the Nazi hated the Jew the Moslem hates the Sikh—and despises him, alleging that he is 'stupid' and 'subhuman'. (In Pakistan this anti-Sikhism becomes as monotonous and wearisome as anti-Semitism was in Nazi Germany; it is merely another manifestation of the same racial-religious virus.) Not that the Sikhs were altogether blameless, any more than the Jews were. The simple

Guru-ship founded by Nanak developed with successive Gurus into a militant sacred dynasty—and there is nothing pacifist about the modern Sikh. The Sikh wars of the 19th century against the British are part of the history of the Punjab, and the Sikhs seem to have played a violent part in the blood-bath which followed partition in 1947.

The tenth and last Guru, Govind Singh, remodelled the Sikh organisation, strengthening its militarist ideal, instituting the Baptism of the Sword, after which a Sikh was to be known as a Khalsa, meaning pure, or elect. He was then to affix Singh—meaning lion—to his name. Physical valour and virility were to be his attributes, and he was to be distinguished by the 'five K's'—the *Kes*, uncut hair, (the Sikh wears a beard, and his long hair is twisted into a top-knot, hidden by the turban) *Kaccha*, short under-pants, oddly symbolising self-restraint, *Kankan*, a comb symbolising purity of mind, *Kirpan*, a dagger, *Kangha*, a steel bracelet symbolising obedience. At his initiation the Sikh is required to drink water in which sugar has been stirred with a two-edged dagger. The extreme militants among the Sikhs became known as the Akalis, 'the deathless'. At the baptism of the Sikh the sacred thread of the Hindu is cut, in token of the rejection of caste.

Govind Singh, the apostle of violence, was in due course murdered by a Pathan, and the militarist ideals of Sikhism appear to have degenerated into banditry, and the Sikhs became the terror of the Punjab. All that blood-soaked history has no place here, but a study of it explains the traditional hatred of the Moslem for the Sikh. The original Golden Temple of Amritsar founded in 1579 was destroyed at that time by the invading Afghan prince, Admed Shah Durrani, and the power of the Sikhs was temporarily broken. When Durrani returned to Afghanistan, banditry was let loose again, and the Sikhs avenged themselves on the Moslem population of the Punjab for their sufferings under the Moguls, and, after the collapse of the Mogul empire, at the hands of Durrani.

Ranjit Singh, who died in 1939, reorganised the Sikhs and rebuilt the temple at Amritsar in its present form.

Oddly enough we met our first Sikh on the evening of the day we visited the Golden Temple. We got back to Batala to find a message from the Indian colonel of a Gurkha regiment to say that he had arranged a Gurkha dance for us at the barracks that evening. We had met the colonel the previous day; he spoke about his Gurkha regiment and asked had we ever seen a Gurkha dance; when we said no, and expressed interest, he promptly offered to 'stage' one for us. We had not expected that he would act so promptly upon his Indian word. We got back from Amritsar weary from a hot and crowded train journey of several hours, followed by a *tonga* drive over a travesty of a road deep in dust, but finding that we were already late we went out again immediately. It was a dark, moonless night, thick with stars, and we had sent the *tonga* away and there was no other means of transport. We trekked off through the darkness and the deep dust to the barracks just outside the town, some two miles distant.

About a mile along the tree-lined road there was the glow of a fire, and as we approached a most horrible smell of a kind we were quite unable to place. The fire proved to be the remains of a funeral pyre. . . .

Later in Lahore we met an English lady who was deeply shocked when I said I thought Batala a horrible place, and that, moreover, it gave me the sensation commonly known as 'the creeps'.

"But it's lovely!" she protested. "Like an old Saracen city!"

I felt rather like Mr. Huxley unable to admire the Taj Mahal.

I think of Batala as ankle-deep in white dust, as nights made hideous with barking dogs, as a wilderness of abandoned mosques and tombs, jackal-infested; I recall filthy narrow back streets, full of garbage and starving stray dogs and swarming with flies, and a dreadful main street of indescribable squalor; and my first glimpse of a Persian wheel, a system of pumping water from a well by means of oxen which go round and round, hour after hour, blindfolded; this particular team of oxen was driven by a blind man.

The Christian College—once a shooting-box of Ranjit Singh—with its garden of palms and guava and mango trees, and its pool, is an oasis in this wilderness. Beyond this blessed greenness and coolness stretches the hot dusty treeless flatness which flows away to the walls of the dilapidated little town. There are some patches of cultivation, the vivid green of corn breaking the general aridity, and in the distance there are snow-capped mountains—though they were hidden behind clouds all the time we were there—but still the impression of dust and aridity remains. There is a huge tank near the college where gaunt buffalo seek the deficient shade of scrawny trees, and where the women kneel on the steps doing their washing, and all day long comes the pat-pat-pat of the clothes being beaten against the stone and drummed with wooden sticks. Hundreds of women and girls squat there all day and every day, those who are not washing clothes washing themselves; others merely squatting and looking on, chatting interminably in their shrill voices.

On the way into the town there is a moist noisome refuse dump. Near it a man squats in the dust selling guavas from the flat basket by his feet. Stray dogs prowl hungrily round the carcase of a buffalo which has been dead a long time and received the attention of vultures. Dust, flies, vultures, jackals, ruins—Batala.

The place saw some savage fighting between Moslems and Hindus, and the college compound was packed with terrified Moslems. A dreadful story is told of a Hindu woman whose child had somehow got caught in the Persian wheel; she was screaming with terror in her helplessness; a young Moslem ran to her aid, and extricated the child which was badly injured; a Hindu crowd gathered, accused the Moslem of killing the child, and beat him to death. Such things happened on both sides.

On Amritsar station, when we were coming to Batala, I inquired of a railway official as to whether it was necessary to change there. He said No, and I turned away, but he came after me.

"Memsahib, excuse me—but is it to Batala you wish to go?"

I replied yes, to Batala.

"Excuse me," he said again, "but why do you go there? There is nothing there. Only a factory."

"And a Christian college," I said, "I have friends there," I added, to reassure him.

"That is different," he agreed.

He was right about the factory. We were marched all over it the following day, and shown heaps of scrap iron, and basements flooded with water, and people squatting on planks in these cellars, and on the ground above them, scraping rust from girders and boilers and ploughshares. At the time of the troubles, it seems, the factory had to be closed down, and the water got in and everything got rusty.

The director who so proudly and so exhaustively—and exhaustingly—showed us over his factory finally showed us his 'Library', which was a glass-doored case of books in his office. "All technical books," he said airily. I glanced at the titles—a habit I have in the presence of books. They included some D. H. Lawrences and *Gone with the Wind*. . . .

The Gurkha dance was already in progress when we arrived. Tables and chairs had been arranged round the barrack compound on two sides; on the other two sides were the tents in which the soldiers were encamped. At the tables sat the officers of the Mess and a few civilians, including some lovely ladies in *sarees* whose flower-like elegance intensified our awareness of our tweed skirts and heavy shoes thick with the dust from the road.

The colonel came across the compound to meet us and we were rapidly introduced to various officers, including a very tall and striking and handsome Sikh doctor. We were offered whisky and sherry, and when the confusion of hospitality and introductions had subsided gave our attention to what was happening to the throb of drums in the centre of the compound. What we saw was a troupe of beautiful dancing-girls with braceleted arms and ankles and a variety of silken costumes.

I turned to the colonel.

"I didn't expect to find girls in the company," I said.

He laughed.

"They are all soldiers," he said, adding, proudly, "the finest fighting soldiers in the world!"

It seemed incredible, watching those small, slender exquisitely graceful figures, and the delicate hand and finger movements characteristic of Indian dancing, that these were 'tough' soldiers, crack riflemen, and expert with a specially savage kind of knife. . . .

The dancing appeared to be no different from any other Indian dancing; there was the sowing of corn, the gathering of rice, the supplication in the temple, the joy when the prayers are answered—dancing in India has always been associated with religious worship. But easily the favourite number was a high-spirited and quite unreligious or traditional affair danced to a popular song which bears the name of the hill-station, Naini Tal, which we had visited from Sitabani. The words of the song, the colonel explained, recount how a young man travelling on a train meets a beautiful young girl from Naini Tal and falls in love with her, and now spends all his time in dreaming of her and of finding her again at Naini Tal. The song has an endlessly reiterated and catching refrain of:

'Naini Tal- O!
O Naini Tal-O!'

The whole officers' mess sang the words with immense gusto, their enthusiasm mounting with every repetition of 'Naini Tal-O!' They clapped their hands together, beating out the rhythm of the drums; the dance, the song, and the drums quickened and finally the colonel leapt into the middle of the dance, followed by all his officers, and a young English schoolmaster who was the only other European in the party. The colonel had not really the figure for such violent leaping and cavorting, but what he lacked in grace he more than made up for in vigour. The young Englishman looked a trifle stiff among so much Nepalese grace, but he painstakingly followed all the stampings and leapings, and spun himself round in swift dizzy circles, all with that air of do-or-die intensity which the English always assume when doing something foreign to their natures. 'Naini Tal-O!' shouted the leaping officers, and 'Naini Tal-O!' shouted the remaining company at the tables, clapping out the rhythm with their hands. Every time the dance appeared to be ending the colonel would start it off again with a roar of 'Naini Tal-O!'

There seemed to be no reason why it should not go on all night and far into the morning, and it became a little monotonous.

But as the sword outwears the sheath and the heart outwears the breast, even Gurkha dancers must finally pause for rest, and the colonel eventually collapsed in a chair, puffing and blowing and laughing and in uproarious spirits.

When he had swallowed another whisky and regained his breath he turned to me and assured me that all this fun between officers and men in no wise affected discipline. Later, he said, when he went into the Mess I would see, for some of these boys would be waiting at table.

He was proved right; the soldiers who had so recently been cavorting with their officers were models of impassive-faced disciplinarianism, saluting smartly when the colonel addressed them, every movement so correctly machine-like it was difficult to realise that a few minutes previously they had been disporting with exquisite grace in feminine silks and jewellery.

The Sikh doctor was very gay. His religion, he declared, told him to do what was good for him—what made him happy. It happens to be one of my own beliefs—'be happy and you will be good', but I was not aware that it was a tenet of Sikhism, and I told him so. Whereat he laughed and said anyhow it was a very good religion. What were we in this world for, he demanded, but to love one another, to love all men as brothers, to live socialism; that was what God intended; that was religion. He embraced the whole Mess with a flash of brilliant dark eyes and brilliant white teeth. He seemed to be twice as tall and twice as broad as everyone else in the room. His turban was terrific, his black beard magnificent. He exuded goodwill, brotherly love, and an immense, inexhaustible zest for life.

"Give us a song, Doctor!" commanded the colonel.

But immediately the handsome giant became shy. He could not sing, he said. Let the colonel himself sing.

The colonel was not at all shy, and all over again began the monotonous refrain:

'Naini Tal-O!
O Naini Tal-O!'

and again the sense of it being quite possible for it to go on for hours and hours, all through the night and all next day too if the colonel thought fit. . . .

Some time after midnight we came out under the thick stars and climbed into a rattling truck the colonel had had sent round for us.

Back at the bungalow we stumbled across the compound and round to the back and crept up the steep broken wooden stairs of the sweeper's entrance, for our host and hostess did not approve of the gay colonel or the Gurkha dances, or a deadly sin called *alcohol*. . . .

Before leaving Batala we visited a refugee camp, with a crafts' centre founded by Lady Mountbatten. At the time of our visit there were 6000 inhabitants; there had been 17,000. Another camp, we were told, had 100,000. The people were the depressed classes—sweepers, cobblers, tanners, weavers,—'Harijans.'

The camp consists of mud huts which they have built themselves, of extremely primitive design. In the tiny yard in front of one a woman was cleaning the front step with a mess of wet green cow-dung. Cow-dung is commonly used in this way by the country people; it has disinfectant properties, and when dry the effect is smooth and neat, like a thin paint.

The men go out to work in the town, or in the fields round about. The women so inclined do spinning and weaving and needlework in the welfare centre, where they receive trained instruction in these arts. They can earn in this way eight annas to one and a half rupees a day. The children are also taught simple handicrafts. If a man is successful in finding a place to live in the town he removes his family from the camp. Families going out are given fourteen days' rations, and a supply of clothing, but once they have gone they cannot be readmitted.

A gallant and futile attempt is made to give the women some idea of hygiene, with special reference to child-birth, parental care, and child-welfare. But, sighed the young woman who showed us round, "They always come into the pre-natal clinic and the labour ward for the sake of the milk they get, not for the medical advice and benefits. When we give them oil for their under-nourished babies they use it for their hair instead of giving it to the babies."

Some of the babies were so under-sized it seemed a miracle they could sustain life. It seemed impossible that such wretched scraps of humanity could ever be built up, but we were shown a perfectly normal baby which, said the young woman, had been just like some of the others when it was admitted to the camp. "If only the mothers would co-operate with us we could do so much more! But very often when a child is under-sized and ailing they won't be bothered; they wish it to die; they say it's no good. . . ."

In the labour ward were two women in dirty white cotton *saris*, their miserable little scraps of babies beside them. The doctor seemed a mere girl; she handled every kind of complicated confinement without assistance or anaesthetics, and her manner suggested complete self-confidence.

The camp swarmed with ragged dirty children; in the welfare-centre both they and their mothers are required to be clean. The children are issued with little bright red or blue dresses. In one tent a group of children sitting on the ground engaged in some small handicraft task scrambled to their feet at a word from their instructress and sang us a monotonous little song which sounded to our European ears more like a recitation.

In the crafts' centre it was possible to feel a little hopeful, for there was represented the best element in the refugee population, but they were only a few hundred compared with the thousands outside. What to do with these homeless helpless people? What can be done with them, when there is not employment enough for the population outside of the camps? They are not people who can easily be settled on the land; they are town people. This tragic and terrible phenomenon

Refugee Handcraft Centre, Batala, East Bengal

of our times, refugees, displaced persons, always populations on the move, one lot of people fleeing from another—fleeing from the Nazis, fleeing from the Communists; Hindus displaced by Moslems; Moslems displaced by Hindus; Arabs displaced by Jews; concentration camps for political dissentients; refugee camps for political refugees; camps for people whom politics have displaced though they themselves have no part in those politics, human beings who are mere pawns in the monstrous game of political chess! All over Europe the displaced persons' camps and in the middle East, and now all over India. . . . In Pakistan they claim that the camp populations have all been dispersed. But to where? Pakistan has its own acute unemployment problem.

We were not very clear as to how to get to Pakistan. Some people told us permits were necessary; others that Pakistan being a British dominion our British passports were sufficient. We were also told that there were no trains across the frontier. It all sounded very difficult, but we had a curious faith that somehow all would eventually be 'revealed'. And the first step was to return to Amritsar.

After our 'night-out with the Ghurkhas' and our late return, we got up at five, and the *tonga* ordered for six o'clock came at six-forty. We had the despairing conviction that it was now quite impossible to catch the train. The horse was the usual skinny starved creature, but the *tonga wallah* whipped him up to a sharp canter and off we charged through the grey light and the white dust, rocking and rolling and bouncing over the bumps, and presently racing another *tonga*, in passable imitation, we felt, of a Roman chariot-race. . . .

We reached the station just as the train came in. Buying the ticket was the next difficulty. Well might Ella Maillart say that we would need a bearer to get our tickets for us—fantastic as it had sounded at the time. Except for buses the queueing system has not yet reached India, and the method of procuring a ticket on a railway station is to surge round the booking-office in a solid mass and thrust an arm through the grill, the money clenched in the hand. Unless you succeed in getting an arm through you stand no chance of securing a ticket. Fortunately, though very unfairly, if you are a second-class passenger, and even more if you happen to be European, you have priority. Sometimes you may even go round the back and into the booking-office and secure your ticket without fighting your way through the mob to the grill. The sight of the brown hands and arms thrust through the grill viewed from inside the booking-office is quite extraordinary. The booking-clerk takes the money from a hand and immediately the owner of the hand calls out his destination; the booking-clerk puts the appropriate ticket into the hand, with any change due, and the hand and arm are withdrawn, and at random the clerk takes the money from another hand, high up or low down, to the right or left or in the middle, whichever happens to be nearest.

Typical mud-house, Malakand Agency, North-West Frontier Province
Batan village women, Malakand Agency, with English hostess

We got our tickets and boarded the train feeling exhausted before the journey had begun. At Amritsar we clambered into another *tonga* and drove to the Mission House where we had lunched the day we had visited the Golden Temple of the Sikhs. We had been sent there then because the Mission people were supposed to be knowledgeable about crossing into Pakistan, as they were coming and going all the time. The lady we were supposed to see, however, had not been there, and she was not there this time.

But the middle-aged English lady who told us this was herself wanting to get into Pakistan, and she was in a distraught state because that morning she had driven out to 'the police lines' to pick up the liaison bus and been told by an official that she should not attempt to make the journey without a special permit. She had produced her British passport but been told that there was now a new regulation and that she would be most unwise to try and by-pass this. I was sceptical about this 'new regulation' and asked her who had told her this.

She replied, "Oh, some little dark man." Then she looked confused. "Oh, dear, what a thing to say—they're all dark here, of course! But nobody seems to *know* anything!"

She brushed her button-through cotton dress down over her lap with a fretful gesture and then noticed that a button was missing from the bottom. She looked ready to cry.

"There, now the button's come orf!"

It was clearly the last straw.

I tried to comfort her by assuring her that we ourselves had been told this and that, and put forward our own philosophy that no doubt all would be revealed. But she was not a philosophic lady, and after a further excited recital of her morning's frustrations ended up by declaring that she wished she'd 'never come out!'

We were joined by a lady with a long face remarkably like a horse and a deep voice with the most extraordinary accent. She said a number of things which were presumably in English but which we could not follow because of the accent, but which appeared to reassure a very little our unhappy fellow-countrywoman, though she kept repeating from time to time that nobody *knew* anything.

Finally the Mission-house lady herself came in and was very matter-of-fact and practical. The upshot of this conference was that we must all go off to Jullundra and find out at first-hand from the High Commissioner. We had breakfast, at which the missionary lady asked the Almighty to 'bless all plans for crossing the border', whilst we gazed self-consciously at our plates, then trekked back to the station for the four-hour journey to Jullundra,—a weary journey through flat and uninteresting country, and the whole thing a sleeveless errand, for the High Commissioner merely confirmed our own belief that no permits were necessary.

We got a bus from the cantonment—with the usual villas in pleasant gardens—to the city, which was what we were beginning to think of as the usual labyrinth of dirty streets full of garbage and starving dogs and poorly-clad people and flies and smells. . . .

That night at the Mission House I recorded in my journal a longing 'for somewhere clean and cool and free of dust and flies and the dreadful poverty and squalor'.

We had no mosquito nets with us and were not provided with any, and all night long the mosquitoes buzzed and zoomed.

The dual moral of this bleak little story is, clearly, never heed excitable middle-aged English ladies in Mission Houses—and always include mosquito netting in your bedding.

11

NORTH-WEST FRONTIER; PESHAWAR, AND THE MALAKAND AGENCY

THE distance by road from Amritsar to Lahore is about twenty miles; nevertheless, the liaison bus takes five hours to make the journey. The time is taken up with delays at customs and passport check-posts on both sides of the frontier. India is anxious that 'unstitched cloth' shall not be taken into Pakistan, and there is apparently a brisk smuggling trade in this. Both India and Pakistan required a written promise that I would take my typewriter back to India by the end of the month. On the Pakistan side the female passengers were conducted to a roadside tent for their 'examination'; we trekked along through the hot dust expecting that we should be required to strip to the waist at least, but this so private examination proved to be merely a peep into our handbags by a pretty young woman in Punjabi pyjamas. It was a purely cursory peep, and we had none of us any idea what she was looking for. Personally I wouldn't be sure that she had any idea either. . . .

On the Indian side an English missionary young woman who had all her boxes stitched into sacking was required to cut the sacking open. An Anglo-Indian young woman in slacks refused to open her boxes to male inspectors, and insisted on private examination by a female inspector in a tent. The horse-faced lady beguiled the journey with a loud conversation-piece about how much nicer India had been before independence, and how salutary a thing the bombing of the tribes on the North-West Frontier had been. . . . which coming from a missionary-lady, a professing Christian, seemed a little odd. The lady whose second attempt it was to cross the border had also known India in the old days, it seemed, and was agreed that India was Not What it Was. . . .

The young woman who had had to remove the sacking from her boxes showed us a press-cutting with a picture of herself and a report of how her two colleagues, a man and a woman, had been murdered in Kashmir by Moslems during 'the troubles'—she could only attribute it to the fact that they had had an Indian woman, a Christian, staying with them, and the assassins had assumed they were sheltering a Hindu. . . .

At one check-post we ourselves were asked if we were missionaries, to which I counter-demanded, "Do we *look* like missionaries?" I added, for the young man's information, that not all English memsahibs were missionaries . . . at which he laughed, as at something very amusing. Before we reached the next check-post we decided to apply a little more lipstick.

We had left the 'police lines' outside Amritsar at eight-thirty that morning, and we reached the office of the High Commissioner for India in Lahore at one-thirty. Private cars, we discovered, on our way back, get through without delay.

We spent the afternoon and evening at a very beautiful modern house in Lahore; it seemed to be all polished parquet floors, bowls of sweet-peas, whirling fans, barefooted silent servants, wide white balconies. From the moment we stepped out of the fine car sent to meet us, and mounted the white steps to the imposing pillared porch, flanked by flowers, we felt helplessly and hopelessly overawed. We had travelled in too many hot dusty overcrowded trains; we were mentally and physically exhausted, and had the depressing feeling that we would never be clean and cool and rested again.

When we had used the European-style bathroom, changed our clothes, lunched at one end of an enormous highly polished table, we were taken for a drive by our beautiful and charming and exquisitely silken hostess, sister of our Peshawar hostess-to-be. Lahore seemed very fine, with its broad streets and impressive buildings and green trees, after the dust and aridity of Amritsar and Batala.

That evening we boarded the Pakistan Mail for Peshawar and had our first clean second-class compartment—and had it, moreover, to ourselves, though we had made no reservations. That was the first change that Pakistan offered; the second was the quietness of the stations after the Indian tumult. We bolted the door on the inside, in accordance with the printed instructions for 'lady travellers' framed above the door, then settled down to read the assortment of heavily propagandist literature concerning Pakistan with which our host had presented us. . . . and with which I propose to deal later. The light was too bad, however, for reading for long, and we spread our bedding —luxuriously—and allowed ourselves to be jolted into uneasy sleep.

We wakened in the morning to a wild landscape of stony hills completely devoid of vegetation. It was so our imaginations had pictured the North-West Frontier. It was, we decided, all as North-West-Frontier as could be, and complete with camels. We crossed the River Indus, flanked by bare sandy hills. Desert, scrubby bushes, shadeless rocks, long processions of camels, occasional glimpses of wild-looking people—all was in order.

As we neared Peshawar the desolation yielded to fertile agricultural country of blossoming orchards and green cornlands. Later we discovered in the valleys of the Khyber Pass the same startling alternations of desert and fertile lands. The North-West Frontier is naturally richly fertile; all the desert is man-made, the forests having been razed, and with no re-afforestation the land has become a dust-bowl.

At Peshawar station we were met by our Pathan host, as tall and handsome as most of his race, and taken in his car to a large and beautiful bungalow standing in a garden full of English summer flowers—sweet-peas and marigolds and hollyhocks in February—and looking across to the great snowy ranges of the Hindu Kush. There was a verdant lawn irrigated by means of shallow ditches connected with a canal.

Our host was much exercised concerning our object in coming to Peshawar, which was to visit an Englishwoman married to an Afghan *mullah* and living in a mud hut village some fifty miles away in the Malakand agency. She had embraced Islam at the time of her marriage, some fifteen years ago, and was living in *purdah*. She had cordially invited us to visit her, but had warned us that she lived 'surrounded by thieves and dacoits', and advised us to come wearing the roughest kind of camping clothes and to bring 'nothing that minds being stolen'. She had inquired of us if taking all this into consideration we were 'ready', and we had replied, emphatically, that we were—despite the fact that all the Indians to whom we had mentioned the project had strongly counselled against it.

The word 'dacoit' occurred monotonously in their warnings. One declared that he would not allow us to go if we were *his* womenfolk; another that dacoits specialised in kidnapping foreigners, particularly women, and holding them for the ransom. In Lahore we were told that our Peshawar host would not allow his wife to spend the night there when she visited there. Even our jungle host mentioned dacoits, and when asked if we could rely on him to ransom us if the worst happened replied, heartlessly, "I'm afraid not—it would cost far too much!"

Now here was our Pathan host, who had been presented to us as the liaison for the venture, putting forward objections and suggesting that the lady be fetched from her village to meet us here in Peshawar. I countered with the objection that the whole point in coming to this province was to avail ourselves of the opportunity to stay in a Pathan village. He then repeated what had been said to us in Lahore about the 'responsibility' which must be felt for two Englishwomen making such a trip. To which I replied that there was no need to feel responsible for us; we had been sufficiently warned—even before we left England we had been warned about not taking risks on the North-West Frontier, where, we had been assured, the tribesmen were apt to shoot at sight, for the sheer fun of it. . . . But, I inisisted, it was sometimes necessary to take risks, particularly if you were a writer in search of interesting material. . . .

He continued to look troubled, and said that he would discuss the matter with the *mullah* himself, as he was arriving that afternoon to ascertain the arrangements.

The *mullah* proved to be tall and bearded and striking-looking. He wore spotless white, a grey blanket thrown over one shoulder, and a round cap. He spoke very little English and was obviously ill at ease in the beautiful 'European-style' drawing-room, and made his escape as soon as the conference—conducted in Urdu and translated into English by our host—was concluded. All the objections seemed to have melted away; we would go the following day in our host's car, and the chauffeur would remain somewhere in the vicinity of the village for the week-end and bring us back.

We accompanied our young and very charming hostess on a shopping expedition in the cantonment to purchase supplies for the trip. Because we did not on this occasion go out of the cantonment she did not wear a *burka*, though when talking to shop-keepers through the car window she drew the end of the long scarf which covered her head across the lower part of her face. No scandal is provoked by the sight of an unveiled Moslem woman in the cantonment, we were assured, but it would cause a great scandal in the old city, or even to attend a public function in the cantonment. It is generally considered that no woman out of *purdah* can be religious—and if she is not religious her morals are suspect.

Some days later when we accompanied our hostess and her young sister to the Islamic College where the latter was a student both drew their *burkas* over their faces as soon as the car left the cantonment, and they did not unveil until we were safely within the college compound, surrounded by prison-high walls. It is quite extraordinarily difficult conversing with someone enclosed in a *burka*; it is rather like trying to converse with a sack. . . .

Peshawar cantonment is as green and wooded as New Delhi, which it quite resembles, with its stately white villas set in gardens full of English flowers and blossoming trees, and with pillared entrance porches covered with purple bougainvillea. The old city of Peshawar is every bit as crowded but not nearly as dirty as old Delhi, and its interest is romantic rather than historic, for to it, every autumn, come the merchant caravans from Kabul, and over the Pamirs from Samarkand and Bokhara. They bring camel-loads of sheep-skin garments, woollen goods, dyes, gold-thread, hand-wrought jewellery, mass-production Russian goods, fruits, and nuts. Once an officer in the British War Office Records Department, stationed on the Khyber Pass, bought from a camel-load of old clothes and battered books a copy of *Confessions and Impressions* . . . which moved him to sit down in the block-house and write to the author in some excitement.

There were long trains of camels—some carrying their young on their backs—on the dusty white road out to the Malakand agency; camels, and bullock-carts, and the dusty grey-green of tall old tamarisks at the sides of the roads—huge tamarisks with gnarled trunks and branches that met across the road. Beyond brilliantly green corn-lands and white-blossoming orchards rose great ranges of blue mountains. We continually passed *tongas* drawn by skeletons of ponies and weighted down with women who looked like black sacks in their all-concealing *burkas*, and with wild-looking men who wore cartridge-belts over their shoulders. The men stared at the unveiled white women in the car and seemed amused. There was the huddle of an occasional mud-hut village lying back from the road, half hidden among date-palms, the houses lost behind the high mud walls of their compounds. When we passed through the wide dilapidated main street of a small town children ran out and threw stones at the wheels of the car. There were men with dyed red beards, in imitation of the Prophet; and no women anywhere, not one. . . .

After two hours or so the car drew up under some trees at the side of the road, where a group of men waited. We recognised the *mullah*; with him were two tall handsome young men, one bearded, whom we later learned were his sons; the other men were servants come to carry our luggage; all wore blankets thrown over their shoulders.

We got out of the car, and our rucksacks and rolls of bedding and the box of provisions were taken out of the back; the chauffeur saluted us, got back into the car, and drove off. Once again there was the half-scared, half-excited sensation—'*This is it!*' Once again we assumed a nonchalance because we had it not . . . rucksacks, bedding, and box were balanced on various heads, and we set off in procession across fields bright green with corn and sugar. We could only walk single file on the narrow ridges of paths across the open fields. Ahead of us the deep blue of the mountains, with a wild, boulder-strewn foreground, was oddly reminiscent of the Western Irish landscape. We descended a gulley and skirted a stream and came up the other side and in the near distance saw a belt of trees and a collection of mud dwellings.

"My village," said the *mullah*.

As we approached the village men, women—unveiled—and children came running down alleyways between the mud walls of the compounds to see the arrival of the white visitors. For days, it seemed, they had been expecting us. We crossed a wide grassless open space with high mud walls and a small mosque at one side, and sheds and oxen and a pile of sugar-cane refuse on the other.

"My house," said the *mullah*, and pointed.

Children swarmed round us, women peeped over walls, savage-looking dogs ran out barking and snarling, men stared at us across their oxen, across the heaps of sugar-cane refuse. . . . The *mullah* indicated a wooden door in a high sun-baked mud wall.

The door gave on to a narrow passage between more walls, and there was a wall thrusting out at the end of the passage, so that the compound was invisible from the passage. We turned the corner of this projecting wall and entered the compound. There were banana trees and a few dusty-looking flower-beds, and in the middle of this arid courtyard a grey-haired elderly white woman wearing some sort of long loose robe girdled at the waist.

She approached us, holding out her hands, smiling.

"So you have come!" she said.

She conducted us across the compound to the verandah of the house at the far side. In niches in the mud walls stood beautiful brightly coloured pieces of pottery—hand-made in the district, our hostess told us. There were divans covered with handwoven striped rugs and with bright cushions; there were books, and oil-paintings . . . it could have been a studio in Chelsea or Bloomsbury . . . almost.

Two pretty soft-eyed young girls in Punjabi pyjamas came forward and greeted us, a little shyly, but in good English. They were the *mullah's* daughters. The *mullah* and his sons and the servants had disappeared; in the compound now were only ourselves and our hostess and the two girls and a woman servant.

We were taken into a room behind the verandah. It was so dark that our eyes had to become accustomed to it. There were two small windows, high up, reached by mud steps up to a mud platform. From these tiny windows our hostess had made the paintings of the landscape we had seen on the verandah. Being in *purdah* she does not go out. The two girls, now eighteen and twenty-one, have been in 'four-walled *purdah*' since they were five years old—that is to say have been confined to the house and compound, prisoners within the high mud walls. Even so they can be said to be better off than the fifteen-year-old girl in the adjoining house—only recently put in *purdah*—for in their house there are the two tiny windows facing outwards, which is not usual in *purdah* houses. By climbing up on to the platform they may have their prisoner's glimpse of the outer world—of mountains and cornlands and sugar. . . .

There were wooden shutters across the windows, which our hostess said we must be sure to fasten at night, 'because of dacoits'. It was a frightening room, with its mud walls and mud floor and its darkness. It was a relief to return to the verandah, where the girls were busy with the pleasant familiarity of tea-things. Our hostess talked non-stop, which was to be expected. We spoke, inevitably, of this 'four-walled *purdah*'. There was 'mental escape', she said.

Somewhere I remembered reading something to the effect that the only true *purdah* was of the mind. But I found the idea unacceptable when confronted with reality. In prison there is always a release date—even to a life-sentence; but women in four-walled *purdah* are prisoners for ever. A girl in *purdah* is in due course married to a man she has never seen, and who has never seen her; the marriage is arranged by the fathers of the two families. The girl is then taken, hidden in her *burka*, from one set of four walls to another. In the second prison, her husband's house, she lives out her life, bearing children and never going beyond the compound—over whose walls she cannot see, and even into the entrance passage of which, beyond the screening inner wall, she may not penetrate.[1]

What, I found myself wondering, watching the two girls of this *purdah* household, goes on in the mind of a girl who has seen literally nothing of the outside world since she was five years old? These two girls, for example, having been taught English by their English stepmother, read English books; but what can they possibly make of them —when they have never seen any of the things referred to therein— shops, motor-cars, buses, streets, villages, towns? They have seen no men except their father and brothers; no women, even, except the village women who came to the house for the homoeopathic medicines dispensed by the English memsahib, and the servants. What was the impact of our own presence—white people in strange clothes from a completely unknown and therefore unimaginable world?

When I stood beside the younger girl whilst she fed grass to the two calves tied up at the far side of the compound she asked me, simply, "Do you have cows in London?"

In the English countryside, I told her, there were many cows, but not in London because that was a big city . . . and then realised that the word 'city' could mean nothing to her, nor could it even if I went on to describe high buildings, shops, crowded streets, traffic. All she knew was the dark mud-walled rooms of the mud house, the compound with its high walls, its calves, the well, the half-wild stray cats who came in, starving creatures, mewing incessantly, the occasional half-wild and no less half-starving dogs that came over the wall. All she knew of the outside world was from pictures in some of the English books.

We felt as oppressed of spirit as though we were visiting people in prison. The younger girl, particularly, struck us as bright and intelligent—an alert child of whom anything could be made. It seemed preposterous that she could not even come for a walk with us in the surrounding countryside. Our hostess had at least voluntarily adopted this life, gone into *purdah* as some women elect to go into a convent in an enclosed order, and within herself she contained all her knowledge of the outer world in which she had spent her life until middle age; but this bright eager little girl was merely the victim of a monstrous system, and for her, and all like her, nothing can be done. Throughout the East change is in the air, it is true, but the *purdah* system will not be abolished overnight, and it may well take another generation to see the end of it, since it is rooted in property, and human beings do not easily change their attitude to their possessions.

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[1] Not all *purdah* is as strict as this, fortunately. In the towns, as I indicated earlier, there are *purdah* girls who go out to colleges—though when there is a male teacher he is required to deliver his lessons from behind a screen, so that he does not see his pupils. But tradition, whether Moslem or Hindu, is always more rigid in the villages, though it always remains a matter of caste and of property. The poor village girl may go about freely, unveiled, because the family has no property to protect, therefore whom she marries is of no consequence. The prime object of keeping a girl in *purdah* is to ensure that she marries only a suitable person, of correct social status, selected for her by her father; and her virtue must be strictly guarded to this end. Pathans of any substance are strict upholders of the *purdah* system, maintaining that it is enjoined by the Koran.

The one hope of escape for these *purdah* women is through marriage with a man of emancipated ideas. One Moslem woman did say to us 'the new (meaning modern) husband does not like *purdah*', but even when this is the case there is still the innate conservatism of the women themselves to combat. And even an emancipated husband, we found, though he is glad for his wife to discard the ugly *burka* when she goes to Europe shrinks from allowing her to appear at any official function in his own country unveiled because of the scandal it would cause, therefore he compromises by keeping her away from such functions. But the *purdah* system will only be abolished by people who have the courage to cause scandals if need be.

On our second day a number of the village women came in to have their *darshan* of us. They came into the compound with their children and sat on the *charpoys* and gazed at us with candid interest—in which wonder and amusement mingled.

The Pathan women are as beautiful as the men are handsome. They have delicate features and beautiful teeth and eyes, and great grace of movement. These village women are all very poor—which is the reason why they are not in *purdah*—but they have an immense suggestion of pride in their bearing. The loveliest of them was a lively and vivid young woman whose health had been broken by too frequent pregnancies; she was again pregnant and looked ill—far too delicate to bear another child; and it seemed doubtful if she could, indeed, survive another pregnancy.

There is no midwife in the district, and no dispensary; the women do what they can for each other, and a common attitude of the uneducated husband, we were told in Peshawar, is 'what does it matter if she dies? I can get another wife, and a younger and prettier one.' The conditions under which the village women bear children are quite dreadful—lying on the ground in a dark room. They have themselves not the most elementary idea of hygiene, and if anything goes wrong no one can help them; they can merely endure agony until they die. Their only protection against pregnancy is the highly insecure one of nursing each child until it is physically impossible to nurse it any longer, with all that that involves of drain on the woman's health.

The children suffer very much from skin diseases, and from eye-infections—which are aggravated by the mascara with which the mothers rim the children's eyes. Our hostess told us she was always begging the mothers not to do it, but to no avail; they consider that it enhances the beauty of the child's eyes; it is the custom, and that is all there is to it.

. . . . .

On this subject of Pathans and their customs (though the habit of making up the eyes of the children is by no means a purely Pathan custom, as I have indicated earlier) Ghani Khan, the son of the famous Congress leader, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, held in prison without trial by the Pakistan government, has something to say in an interesting and entertaining little book[1] about his people.

He says that ninety per cent of them are illiterate. 'The Pathan has thousands of customs—for death, birth, marriage, love, hate and war. . . . They are neither good nor bad, for they depend on time, place and circumstance. But this can be said about all of them, that they are an attempt to hold and preserve a standard of value and way of life that has given the world a great fighter and a poor soldier. . . . When the Pathan is a child his mother tells him, "the coward dies but his shrieks live long after", and so he learns not to shriek. He is shown dozens of things dearer than life, so that he will not mind either dying or killing. . . . He is taught to look at the hawk and forget the nightingale.'

It could be that Ghani Khan, out of his love for his people, romanticises them a little; he admits that he is prejudiced in their favour, adding that he would hate himself if he were not. He gives a picture of a proud and passionate and courageous people, whose customs are their laws. He honours them because they would rather steal than beg, and because they have none of 'that genteel submission so common in civilised man'. The Pathan, he says, 'has a proud head and an empty stomach; that is why he is a great dacoit. . . . When a social system fails to provide for his dear ones he tramples it down under his grass sandals.' And so this great patriot loves his people 'in spite of their murders and cruelty, ignorance and hunger'. The Pathan, he declares proudly, 'kills for a principle and cares not who calls it murder.'

Abdul Ghaffar Khan is a pacifist. He has been called the Gandhi of the North-West Frontier. I do not know whether his son, whilst defending the violence of the Pathans, nevertheless himself believes in the principles of non-violence; but I do know that I know what he means when he writes with such a violently defensive love of his people and declares that he would 'rather see a man hang for dacoity than see him crawl along a pavement with outstretched palms asking for alms from those who have found generous buyers for their souls'. I call myself a pacifist, but that, nevertheless, is the sort of assertion which makes me want to get up and cheer. . . .

However, despite all the warnings, it was evidently the close season for dacoits when we were there, though our hostess was jumpy when we had our evening meal—the *mullah* and his sons did not eat with us—

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[1] *The Pathans*, published by The National Information & Publications, Ltd., Bombay, 1947.

on the verandah by candlelight, starting and exclaiming 'What's that?' at any unexpected sound, and when we went walking in the hills with the sons of the house the elder took a rifle and slipped some cartridges into his jacket. When we stood at the top of a hill, looking out over the wild landscape, and a man who had been watching us intently from below began walking up in our direction, the rifle was immediately loaded. . . .

The *mullah* came into the compound just before we retired to our room. He seemed to glide in through the darkness, and sat, a dim white figure, in the shadows of the background, a silent aloof presence. The brain-fever bird called frenziedly out in the wild loneliness beyond the compound. The stars were very thick and bright. We asked about jackals, but our hostess seemed more exercised about the possibility of the half-wild dogs coming in over the walls. If we heard noises in the night we should take no notice; it would be all right; we should keep our door bolted, and the shutters bolted across the windows. . . . She and her husband would make up their beds on the verandah, outside our room; they would be 'on guard'. . . .

We murmured to each other, as we groped about our dark room spreading our bedding by the dim light of a small thin candle, that it was a good thing we were not of nervous dispositions.

The dacoit season, we learned, is when the sugar is high; then it is possible to kill a man and fling his body into the sugar and it is not found for a long time . . . by which time the dacoit has left the Agency and is beyond its jurisdiction. Sugar is good cover for dacoits, as teak is for tiger. The dacoits come down from the hills and camp out hidden in the sugar, waiting for opportunity to raid and rob; at this season people who have anything to protect keep watch from the walls of their houses all night. It is for this reason that so many of the houses in the North-West Frontier Province are built with watch-towers and avoid windows facing outwards.

Dacoity, as Ghani Khan says, is the product of poverty and hunger. The Government of India subsidised the tribes whose lands were too barren to afford them a living. Under the new régime there are no such subsidies, with the result that dacoity has increased. There is an abominable system of land tenure by which the people who rent and work the land must return a certain percentage of profit from it to the landlord; they cannot possibly produce enough to live on and to make this return, so that they fall into the hands of moneylenders, and they starve.

So long as this system persists so long will there be this appalling poverty—and dacoity. In order to make two rupees a day at the sugar mills a man must work for the greater part of twenty-four hours; he takes his bedding down to the mill—a collection of rough sheds—and snatches a couple of hours sleep during the night, when sleep overpowers him, and then goes on again. Because the work is seasonal he has to make all he can whilst the going is good; afterwards comes the work in the cornfields; then there comes the time when there is no work of any kind. That is his life; either that or he is struggling to live off land he does not own and for which he must yield a share of the inadequate profits.

We stood in a fruit and vegetable garden whilst the elder son of the house explained all this to us. A number of women with babies on their hips and children clinging to their ragged skirts gathered round, and it was evident from their manner that they were appealing to us. I asked our companion what they wanted, and he said, "They think you are doctors; they want you to give them medicines for their children."

The children looked rickety, and there were the usual sores and inflamed eyes. A dispensary, I thought despairingly, if only there could be a dispensary—the sort of thing here on the North-West Frontier that Verrier Elwin carried out so effectively among the Gonds of the Central Provinces jungles. Such a very little elementary hygiene and medical service would make so vast a difference to the lives of these people; but it would call for a devotion which, though it does exist, is as rare as a practising Christianity.

When we left the garden we followed a rough sun-baked mud track along compound walls and came to the ramshackle sheds of a sugar mill. We stood for a while watching the oxen going round in circles turning the winch which crushes the sugar cane, then went down some steps and into a dark shed and watched the juice flowing into the wide huge pans in which it is boiled. Some distance away, beside a stream, we came to a flour-mill, where again in a dark shed men worked long hours in order to survive at a starvation level of existence. Some of their women and children ran out from the mud huts on a crag at the other side of the stream to look at us; that they were all very poor was evidenced from their thinness and their rags.

Crossing the open fields on the way back to the village one of a group of children darted forward and gave us flowers, then ran shyly off again, undersized little children, the girls in long skirts, with pigtails down their backs, the boys in a conglomeration of garments—faded cotton pyjamas and a waistcoat, perhaps, or no more than a ragged shirt; or a shirt with a waistcoat on top, or, fantastically, a European-style pullover or old sports' jacket—sometimes the whole lot on one small thin body.

I don't know whether word went round among the children, after the flower incident, that the strange white foreigners were approaching, but when we reached the village children ran out in all directions from the alleyways between the mud walls, till we had what seemed a whole regiment of them following us—thin-legged little things with ragged clothes and flashing eyes and teeth. When we smiled at them they roared with laughter. We laughed, then, because they laughed, and then the laughter seemed to run through their ranks like fire running through dry grass; all the walls, as well as the alleyways, were suddenly alive with brown laughing faces. Our companion was for shooing them off after a time, thinking that they embarrassed us, but we said no, no, let them be—we were as good as a circus, and why wouldn't they laugh?

The day we left, our hostess decided to come back with us in the car to Peshawar. This decision involved much consultation with the *mullah*, to whom word was sent outside the compound. He spent much of his time squatting on a *charpoy* outside the mosque, reading the Koran, or merely letting the time pass, Eastern-wise. His sons also did no work. When grass needed cutting for the calves the task was allotted to a servant, since it would be considered undignified for them to do menial work. It was not considered undignified, however, for their sisters to work in the house and compound.

Our hostess's proposal caused some consternation in the domestic circle. The two girls looked unhappy.

"I hope they will not keep you long in Peshawar," the older girl said, anxiously.

"A few days only," their stepmother promised. Their dependence on her was very evident; also that she felt the full weight of it.

We felt a curious sadness in bidding them good-bye. It was unlikely that we should ever see them again, unless their stepmother should ever get their father's permission to bring one or both of them with her to Europe. The younger one had wanted very much that we should take her photograph when we were taking pictures of the house and compound; but we had given our word that we would not do so, since the *mullah* had expressed that wish, and though we had ample opportunities for cheating we kept our word. Orthodox Mohammedanism does not permit of representations of the human figure in any form—photography, painting or sculpture. It is enjoined by the Koran that there shall be no making of 'images'. We took some pictures of the village women, with their consent, though clearly they did not like it very much, and sat with their backs half or wholly turned to the camera.

The younger girl said, wistfully, at the point of departure, "Write us a letter."

We promised that we would, and we did of course write to our hostess, before we left India, but not to the girl—for what could we say to her? What could anything from our world mean to her? What could we wish her—except that one day by the grace of Allah she might escape from those four walls out into the wide free world?

The two girls accompanied us across the compound to the jutting wall of the passage, and there we left them, since they were not allowed to come farther. The *mullah* went ahead to clear the village of menfolk so that the lady of this *purdah* household might with propriety emerge.

She was of course wearing her *burka*, but even that, apparently, did not satisfy the *mullah's* rigid orthodoxy. So that when we came out into the square there were only a few women and children, and all the men working at the sugar mill had disappeared . . . though not quite. A turban bobbed here and there above a wall, and a brown face peeped round a shed, and a white-clad figure ducked back not quite in time. . . .

In a soft rain that made the landscape look more Irish than ever we made the journey across the brilliant green corn and sugar fields to the road, where it had been arranged the car should wait. We moved in a straggling procession—ahead the *mullah*, well in advance to see that the way was clear, no males about; some distance behind him we two, some distance behind us our veiled hostess, a moving white bundle, and, bringing up the rear, the two sons of the house, one carrying a chair, lest our hostess should need rest by the way, since she was not accustomed to walking beyond the compound . . . among Pathans only menials sit on the ground.

As we approached the road a group of men became visible working in the fields, but the *mullah* called out to them and waved his stick with a gesture of clearing the way, and at once the men scattered and ran, scuttling out of sight among some sheds, glancing over their shoulders as they did so at the distant advancing figure of the veiled woman. They glanced in her direction almost fearfully, and scuttled as though in fear of being run over by this forbidden apparition of a woman—a *purdah* woman. . . .

Striding along with our exposed faces—and again that sense of nakedness we had known in Port Said—it seemed strange to us that the woman for whom all this way-clearing was being carried out with such thoroughness was a fellow countrywoman. And when we sat next her in the car, with the sack-like *burka* shrouding her face and figure, shutting her off from us, we felt a kind of resentment that she who was one of us, as English as ourselves, a woman of the West, should submit to a system from which the women of the East are beginning to emancipate themselves. We felt that she should be allied with the pioneers of that emancipation. Her own attitude is that whilst she does not like *purdah*, either as a system or for herself personally, its sudden abolition, as in Turkey, would lead to moral excesses, and that pending its gradual and inevitable abolition she must, as a Moslem woman, and one married to a *mullah*, keep the rules. . . .

In the front of the car, with the driver, sat the *mullah*, but when we reached the house in Peshawar he disappeared and we did not see him again. We gathered that he had gone off 'to some *mullah's* place' in the old city, and would turn up again when it was time for his wife to return to the mud-hut village and the four-walled *purdah*. . . .

Having in his official capacity to visit the police-training centre at Shabkadar our host took us with him in the car for the drive. The route

The Great Immambara, Lucknow

was decorated with triumphal arches of evergreens and flags for the visit of the Governor-General the following day.

The police barracks stands on high ground above the village. We got out of the car on to a wide terrace, and for a moment as I stepped out I had the irrational idea that this terrace was a kind of floating platform, though what it was supposed to be floating on I did not, in the midst of the sensation, work out. But there was a feeling of dizziness and of the earth moving under one's feet, swaying under one's feet, like a platform floating on water. I looked at the other two and on their faces was an odd expression. Then our host asked, "Did you feel it?" In the moment in which he spoke we were aware of the birds flying up excitedly from the trees in the gardens below the terrace, and of the car rocking not from side to side but to and fro.

We looked at him, inquiringly, still not comprehending.

"An earthquake tremor," he said, adding, "We usually get them in the hot weather. . . ."

We could then each admit to the feeling of giddiness when we got out of the car, and of having felt shy of mentioning it, each of us believing it purely personal.

A number of tiles were dislodged from roofs, and a few chimneys collapsed. We saw some of the damage when we got back to Peshawar, both in the cantonment and in the old city; the effect was of a nearby bomb. There were no casualties. But just as after a nearby bomb everyone compared notes, so now—"Did you feel the earthquake shock?" and then comparisons of personal reactions—feeling sick, vomiting, dizziness, headache. And of course if you could throw in a 'shuffled' roof and a collapsed chimney, so much the more effective, just as one threw in, with a curious pride, one's broken windows after 'a bit of a blitz'. . . .

One of the letter-boxes outside the General Post Office in Peshawar cantonment, we noticed, was labelled, '*India and other foreign countries.*'

'Peshawar', we were told, means 'the Industrial place', but it would be better called the Industrious Place, for it is not yet industrialised in the true sense, though it has local industries—and hopes for more. Pakistan in general sees the solution of its economic problems in terms of increased industrialisation—and the inclusion of Kashmir into Pakistan. In Pakistan you can get very tired of 'the Kashmir question'.

Our hostess took us to her parents' house in the old city, as I had expressed interest in the old houses and wondered what their interiors were like.

We left the car in a narrow crowded street and turned down an even narrower one, little more than a cobbled alleyway, and picked

The Golden Temple, Benares

our way through the usual garbage and excrement. Then up a steep narrow stone staircase and through a door and into a built-round courtyard. In the rooms opening off this courtyard our hostess's father entertained his men friends. The upper part of the house, as is customary, constituted the women's quarters.

We went up into a dark room with violent wallpaper and dark brown lace curtains. There were large faded portraits of Edwardian beauties high up on the walls. There was ordinary Victorian-style European furniture, and coloured glass windows which added to the darkness of the room. There was also, despite the fact that this was a Moslem home, a large photograph of the head of the house. This was the 'Western' sitting-room. We stepped out on to a flat roof, where the sunlight was blinding after the darkness of the room, and crossed it to the 'Eastern' sitting-room, with tiled walls and no furniture at all, only carpets on the floor and cushions, and a long bolster along the wall. This room also served as a dining-room, our hostess's mother told us. She held by the hand a small girl with a mop of wild black hair, a granddaughter by another of her daughters.

"Is she not ugly?" she demanded, cheerfully.

We replied, with truth, that we did not think her at all ugly, and appealed to our hostess.

"She is ugly," she said. "We all think it a pity she is so ugly."

Poor little ugly duckling . . . yet I wager she turns out a swan!

We descended again to the male quarters, where the head of the house emerged, deploring the fact that we departed so soon, and without taking a cup of tea. We assured him, as we had his wife, that it was only because we had so recently breakfasted. He showed us his quarters, with some pride. The walls of the rooms were hand-painted in a blinding design of blue stripes and florid pink roses. It was a little difficult to see what he did with so many rooms. One was furnished as an office, though we had been told he was retired. One was like a board-room, with an enormous table surrounded by chairs. Down below, he said, there was a cellar for sleeping in during the hot weather.

We talked a little and he appeared to be a man of enlightened views. Yet here he was with his quarters downstairs and the women's quarters above.

The house and its arrangements, we were told, were quite typical. Our hostess offered to take us into other old houses, "But you would find them all much the same," she said. We took her word for it and declined the offer. Our minds were on the afternoon's excursion, which was the Khyber Pass. . . .

It is necessary to get a permit for the Khyber Pass. The one on which we made the trip was made out to myself 'and party'—which astonished me, as I was under the impression that we were in our host's party. I should like to have kept it as a souvenir of the fulfilment of a dream, but we had to give it up on our way back.

Photographically it was a bad day for the trip as there was a continuous drizzle of rain, but greyness suits the wild bare mountains and deep valleys.

At the Pakistan end of the pass the watch-towers of the fort of Jamrud look out from a stony hill-top over a flat stony wilderness. The pass runs into the mountains a few miles farther on and begins to climb. A signpost with drawings of camels, horses, bullocks, points to a road branching off from the highway and indicates the old original road into Afghanistan. The great new highway is reserved for motor traffic.

For a time the road climbs steadily, doubling back on itself in a series of sharp hairpin bends, precipitous above a deep dark valley. I am told that people get sick from such persistent zig-zagging; personally I found the whole arrangement entirely satisfactory, because it was all so exactly as I had imagined it when, at the age of twelve, I had listed it in pencil in the margin of my school atlas, on the map of the world, as one of the 'places to be visited'. . . .

It's a poor pass that has no zig-zags, and so far as I am concerned the Khyber Pass is all that a pass should be, with block-houses perched high up on rocky ledges, and every village fierce with watch-towers and high mud walls, and the higher you climb the wilder and more dramatic the tremendous views of mountain ranges in the distance and gigantic cliffs of sheer rock in the foreground. When you reach the highest and narrowest part of the pass you are under cliffs some two thousand feet high, and where the fifteen-foot wide road swings round the wall of the cliff there is an exciting sense of a deep drop into sheer space on the outer side. It is disappointing after this to descend by a series of zig-zags to the broad safe valley and the fort of Landi Kotal, which looks out over the plains of Afghanistan.

There is a train as far as Landi Kotal; you get occasional glimpses of the line disappearing into little tunnels in the mountain sides. It is apparently very slow and infrequent and 'no one ever uses it' . . . which must be assumed to be hyperbole.

After Landi Kotal the scenery is less dramatic, the valley broadens out, and the highway follows the Kabul river along to Landikhana, which is the Afghan frontier. Herds of camels graze like cattle among the sparse grass and scrubby bushes on the lower slops of the mountains. At one point we saw, traversing the old road, an enormous camel-train, with numerous young. There are frequent villages with mud walls and watch-towers, every village a tribal fort, and in the valleys unexpected patches of bright green cultivation and occasional drifts of pink and white blossoming orchards—with the fierce bare mountains rising all round. So savage and enchanted a place, you feel, could not do other than breed fierce, proud tribes. The Afridis are the most powerful of the Pathan tribes, and there is a long history of British 'expeditions' against them.

We sat in the car and looked through the mist of rain beyond the barbed wire of the frontier into Afghanistan—into which you may not penetrate without a not-easily obtained permit . . . and which has, therefore, all the attraction of being a closed country, like Nepal and Tibet. Not that I would have it otherwise. Let there still be somewhere inaccessible and difficult—if only to excite imagination and keep alive the spirit of travel-adventure in a shrinking world. The aeroplane has not merely reduced the size of the world but the adventure of voyaging. In Nepal your permit takes you only to the capital; you cannot penetrate more than about five miles along the valleys without being turned back. Foreigners, particularly white ones, are not wanted. Let us be grateful that some parts of the world remain inviolate. There has to be somewhere where the springs of life remain uncontaminated by the contemporary decadence of football pools and Hollywood films. Somewhere to which the travel agencies cannot book you, and from which you cannot send a picture postcard home. . . .

We left Peshawar that evening by the Pakistan Mail for Lahore. The North-West Frontier interlude was over, and it was somehow right and proper that it should finish with the dramatic climax of the Khyber Pass and the threshold of Afghanistan.

III

WEST PAKISTAN; LAHORE

THIS second time in Lahore we were so highly organised by our energetic and painstaking hostess, shown so many things, required to do so many things, that we were left with a confused impression of mosques and schools and colleges and public gardens and welfare institutions, and the feeling that of the city itself, one of the oldest in what used to be called India, and the capital of the Punjab, we knew very little. For one thing we never set foot in it, and only by walking the streets of a town or city is it possible to get the 'feel' of it. Viewed through the car windows it appeared to be an imposing city, with a number of large, brown and architecturally meretricious buildings set in gardens full of flowering trees and tall palms, in the Bombay manner.

We were told that it 'used to be a fine city, but now it is spoilt by the refugees everywhere'.

The chauffeur, sent to meet us at the station with the car, said, "Our people are dirty because they are poor." And, "People do not love this Pakistan sufficiently. They work for themselves only, instead of for their country." And, inevitably, "We need Kashmir. When the Kashmir question is settled many of our problems will be solved."

Always with Pakistanis 'the Kashmir question'. They feel about Kashmir as the Nazis felt about Sudetenland; they publish little maps showing its geographical unity with the main body. They claim that Kashmir is eighty per cent Moslem and in a free plebiscite would vote itself to Pakistan; for this reason, they say, India is afraid to hold the plebiscite. Mr. Jinnah maintained that 'geographically, economically, religiously, culturally, Kashmir belongs to Pakistan!' An Indian writer[1] has described the Kashmir conflict as 'one of the bitterest fruits of partition'. We were told that Pakistan means 'the pure country'—presumably purely Moslem, just as Hitler's Germany was purely Aryan—but the word was originally coined from the names of the five Moslem provinces and their peoples—the P for Punjab, A for the Afghans of the North-West Frontier, K for Kashmir, the S for Sind, and the final 'tan' from Baluchistan—though 'stan' is a syllable which can stand alone, meaning country. But the most important letter is the K. . . .

To protest against Jinnah-worship to a Pakistani is to provoke the retort—'Is it worse than Gandhi worship?' To which, if you are tactful, you reply that it is a matter of point of view. Gandhi was reverenced by the mass of Hindus as a saint; Jinnah-worship was something different; it had the quality of idolatry that Hitler inspired.

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[1] K. L. Gauba, in *Inside Pakistan* (Rajkamel Publications, Ltd., Delhi, 1948).

In a little book written after Jinnah's death and entitled *He Shall Never Die*[1] by a young Pakistani newspaper man, the author writes, "If Islam permitted deification, if Muslims could think on those lines, then most certainly the Quaid-i-Azam would be worshipped today by the Muslims of Pakistan. Even without deifying him few of us have any doubt that he is immortal."

In the Pakistan supplement of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* F. Krenkow writes, 'Pakistan stands for all that is noble and sacred in life for a Muslim.'

Pakistan propaganda is rabid, and like all rabid propaganda is frequently merely silly. In *Our Pakistan*,[2] for example, the author assures us, writing as late as December 1948, that Muslims in the Indian Union are 'systematically hounded out and decimated. Their mass massacres go on relentlessly', whereas he has only to set foot in the Indian Union to see for himself the absurdity of this melodramatic assertion; in Delhi he would find the great mosque packed with thousands of Moslems every Friday, and in Lucknow a large Moslem population living amicably side by side with the Hindu population, and similarly all over India.

At the Ram Ganga Home for Destitute Women and Children in Lahore, the inmates of which are mostly refugees, we were shown a child with his leg in an iron and assured that he had received a Hindu bayonet wound. A number of women and girls who had been abducted by the Hindus—both sides went in for this outrage—and recovered from them are being held in the prison in Lahore, 'because after what has happened to them their families are not willing to receive them back, and it is a problem to know what to do with them'—which seems very bad luck on the unfortunate women, which they themselves, apparently, also feel, for they 'give trouble'.

In Lahore we were taken over the Aitchison College, the snob school for boys, run on English public school lines, with an English headmaster, and principal, taken to tea at the Kinnaird Ladies' College, shown round the Forman Christian College, an American-sponsored and subsidised institution for male students, where we were shown the library, and a great collection of iron pipes for a well-sinking scheme—'really, the things we are shown!'—and whisked round the Islamic Ladies College by a very angry principal. Though she was not more angry than her English guest . . . who was completely furious.

The previous evening, much against my inclinations—for I loathe public speaking, and it is always an ordeal—but, to please my hostess, who was an ardent social worker, I had addressed an audience of

[1] Wares Ishak, published by Ferozons, Karachi, 1949.

[2] By Mahmud Brelvi, published by Ferozons, Karachi, 1949.

women at the Y.W.C.A. I spoke on modern educational methods in England, and the handling of juvenile delinquency. Male reporters present were kept behind a screen, because some of the ladies were in *purdah*. Afterwards an enthusiastic English lady insisted that the following day I must see the Islamic Ladies College, and from politeness I accepted the invitation, though we were both by that time heartily sick of being shown round schools and colleges—we had had it happen to us in Amritsar, in Batala, and already three times in Lahore. We were swept off to the Islamic Ladies College at nine-thirty the following morning, and to my astonishment and indignation the principal, when she received us, began immediately to tell me that she would like me to expand my yesterday evening's lecture, but not to mention sex, as I had then, as her girls were in *purdah* and it was not considered a fitting subject. . . .

I stared at her in amazement.

"But I was not asked to speak here, and I cannot do so! I cannot possibly repeat last night's lecture at this hour of the morning. I have not come prepared to speak, and," I added with complete truth, "I feel extremely ill."

The highly-spiced, meaty, greasy Moslem food had not agreed with us, and we had both been feeling ill with nausea and stomach pains for some days past, and from my Russian experience I feared dysentery.

I was feeling so ill that morning, with violent headache in addition to all else, that the very suggestion that I should give a lecture made me feel like throwing back my head and howling like a dog. . . .

The principal, however, declared that I could not do otherwise than speak now. "The girls are assembled and waiting for you," she stated, relentlessly.

I cannot think now why I did not tell her that the sooner she dispersed them and put an end to their waiting the better; instead of which I allowed myself to be conducted to a hall exactly like a barn. It was so like a barn that there was a deafening tumult of swarms of sparrows on the rafters. It was quite impossible to speak against that twittering, and after a few half-hearted opening remarks I gave it up, turning to the principal and declaring that it was quite impossible to lecture in an aviary. At this the girls burst into delighted laughter, and the principal got up and began flapping about in an attempt to shoo the birds out. There was a pandemonium of girlish laughter, a pulling of cords opening and shutting high-up windows and skylights, a rush and flutter of wings, and more bird noises than ever.

When some of the birds had been dislodged, and comparative tranquillity restored, I attempted to continue, but there was still a heavy twittering under the eaves, my heart was not in the job, my own words bored me utterly, and there was a ball of fire in my entrails. After about five minutes or so, I gave it up—throwing in as a concession a readiness to take questions. But there were no questions, and the principal could do nothing but dismiss the girls—and furiously conduct us on a whirlwind tour of the dark old-fashioned college.

When she showed us the screen behind which the male teacher gave his lectures she said, bitterly, "That, no doubt, is something you cannot understand."

"I understand it," I assured her, "but it doesn't make it seem less preposterous!"

It was a relief to all concerned when we finally got back to the car. The English author's visit to the Islamic Ladies College of Lahore had not been a success.

There are some pleasant public gardens in Lahore. There are the Shalamar Gardens, the Shadhara Gardens, with the emperor Jahangir's marble tomb, and a park originally known as the Lawrence Gardens, but after a visit by Jinnah and his sister Fatima it was renamed the Bagh-e-Jinnah, and the rose-garden which is part of it Gulistan-e-Fatemah. The author of *Inside Pakistan*, in the edition of his book revised in November 1948, declares that these gardens 'are now deserted. Ever since Syed Mohsin Shah was stabbed by a Muslim goonda in the belief that he was stabbing a Hindu, the popularity of the gardens have (*sic*) waned'. I can only say that in March 1949 the gardens were full of people strolling along the avenues of tall palm-trees, or sitting on the seats round the rose-garden, and there was a man bowing to the earth, busy with his sundown prayers.

There are also the gardens of the beautiful Shalir mosque, with its white domes and red minarets and intricately carved white marble balconies. These gardens are laid out like the gardens of the Taj Mahal, with cypress-flanked pools.

The old city is the usual labyrinth of narrow crowded streets, on one of which there is a glittering golden mosque with the usual dirty fly-infested steps up to it. On the main street of the 'civil lines', known as the Mall, there is a Kipling monument, an old green cannon known as Kim's Gun.

And that is all I know about Lahore. Except that there is 'prohibition' for Moslems, but that difficulty is overcome, if you have means, by employing a Christian servant.

The author of *Inside Pakistan* says that 'in the old pre-Pakistan days, Lahore was the Paris of India. Its fine buildings, spacious and historic gardens, its cosmopolitan outlook, it was the grand rendezvous of the East'. His following description of Lahore after Pakistan may have been valid immediately after partition, but is certainly not so for 1949 and it is a pity he did not check up on this when revising his book in November 1948. When we drove through the Anarkali, which is a bazaar, it was teeming with life, crowds thick on its pavements, shop, of every kind open on to the street, and there were certainly more than 'a couple or three dozens' of shops open on the Mall, and restaurants and cafés besides; and more than 'a paltry hundred students' at the Forman College. It is always a pity when propagandist zeal, for or against, makes havoc of the facts.

Our hostess was a beautiful, intelligent, and serious-minded, active in social welfare work, and a brave pioneer woman in her breakaway from *purdah*. Quite unveiled she drove with us through the crowded streets of the old city and the Anarkali. It is through such women that the emancipation of Moslem women will come.

She had a little daughter who joined us sometimes at meals—a tiny little thing, small-boned as Eastern children invariably are. Charming she looked with her pigtails and her little Punjabi pyjamas. When we asked her her name she replied, astonishingly, "Johnny MacLane from down the lane." She will know nothing of *purdah*, of smothering *burkas*, lessons by a male teacher behind a screen, and marriage to a man she has never seen; she is the Moslem woman of tomorrow.

IV

LUCKNOW

We left Lahore in what I would call a 'truck', but which the English lady worker from the Y.M.C.A. who drove it called a 'brake'. We had to pick up a gentleman whose name we thought was Singer, but which proved to be Singha. He emerged from a garden full of flowers—chrysanthemums and roses and dahlias and sweet-peas all blooming together—kissed his brother on both cheeks, then stuck his head inside the brake and demanded, startlingly, "How's Reginald?"

He was a very European-style gentleman and full of caustic comment concerning both India and Pakistan. He was travelling about India lecturing to students and advising them on how to behave when they came to England—and had caused great offence in many quarters thereby. Indians are as easily offended as the Irish. Hundreds of years of occupation engenders a certain mentality; when a nation is for generations regarded as inferior its instinct is to be on the defensive. I myself gave great offence to a gathering of journalists in Madras, later, by saying that the standard of journalism in India was generally low—due on the one hand to floweriness of style, and on the other to an imperfect knowledge of English—a fact which is self-evident.

We passed through the Pakistan check-posts without trouble, and when we reached the Indian customs alighted to meet a Customs officer flippantly referred to by Mr. Singha as our chauffeur's 'Sikh boy-friend', a tall and handsome gentleman with flashing eyes and a noble beard. He conducted us through the white dust to a small dark room in an ugly brick building, where we met another Sikh, no less handsome but much less expansive. A bearer brought us strong tea in thick cups, and our host told us how many thousands of rupees a day he collected in Customs' duties. I did my best to tuck my feet in their brand-new North-West Frontier sandals, given us in Lahore, under the seat.

We had been assured in Pakistan that a Sikh was one of the lower forms of Indian life—cruel, stupid, 'sub-human' (this expression was actually used). The English lady was in favour of taking the Sikh Customs' officer back with her into Lahore, on one of her journeys, because, she said, a start had to be made to break down this absurd prejudice. The Sikh, however, did not appear to be enthusiastic about the idea. A party of Sikhs, it seems, go every year into Lahore to visit a temple there, but they go straight to the temple, under escort, for their protection, and go straight back over the border afterwards; only so may a Sikh with safety enter Pakistan.

At Amritsar we parted with the English lady and the Y.M.C.A. brake and had tea on the station with Mr. Singha, 'European style', though there was nothing European about it, and once again the hot spiced food went down into the already over-spiced belly, which resumed its painful protest, with the result that I made a weak suggestion that we should travel to Lucknow first-class. . . .

The suggestion was met with the contempt it undoubtedly deserved, though Mr. Singha was astonished that we had been travelling anything but first.

"You know I am ill!" It was both plea and accusation.

Both plea and accusation were similarly dismissed with the deserved contempt.

A cold young voice pointed out: "It's a difference between ninety rupees and three hundred. And we haven't enough money."

Mr. Singha was immediately in favour of lending us the money.

The cold young voice said, "Please yourself," but the tone added, clearly, "But you know what I'll think of you if you do."

We travelled second.

We had room to spread our bedding, but the compartment filled up with Indians during the night, all women, and they chattered like a cageful of monkeys at all hours, so that sleep was impossible. The morning, which began as soon as it was light, around five o'clock, seemed interminable, and the heat became intense when the sun was high. There was a clutter of grubby children clambering all over the place, whilst their mothers squatted on the benches chewing betel and occasionally opening up great hampers and brass vessels like steamers and eating messes of food. Between heat and exhaustion and *malaise* we had no desire to eat, and the day dragged as only a day following a night in an Indian train can drag.

We reached Lucknow at two, and 'phoned to our hosts, who sent two cars down to the station to meet us. The second car was for our luggage. . . .

We were swept off to one more beautiful house with broad terrace balconies, flat roof, and garden full of English summer flowers. We had barely washed and changed before a press-man arrived. He said he hoped he wasn't interrupting my tea. I assured him that nothing and no one was going to do that. Then he began asking questions—the sort of major questions Indian journalists love to ask—what did I think of the Soviet Union, Pakistan, the British Labour Government; what, in my opinion, were the trends in literature in Europe—not England, mark you, Europe—and in America. . . .

When he had done with me others arrived; some were journalists representing newspapers, others described themselves as poets and playwrights. The latter wanted to know what were the trends in contemporary poetry in England, Europe, America; what did I think of

Indian poetry; what did I think of Shaw, Wells, Priestley, the poetry of Sarojini Naidu, and the novels of Mulk Raj Anand. . . .

One young man who repeatedly referred to himself as a 'fellow-author' kept on taking photographs—would I sit here, stand there, turn my profile, gaze at my hostess.

After the photographing we were taken for a drive to a park, where we alighted from the car and were conducted along a dusty path and round a hot-looking flower-bed for perhaps rather less than three minutes. We were then driven back to the house where a number of newspaper men awaited the press-conference I had in despair said I would give, as an alternative to answering the same questions over and over again to individual journalists. Then it all began all over again—what were my impressions of India, what did I think of the Soviet Union, what were the trends in European and American literature and poetry. . . .

In the middle of it all Mr. and Mrs. Chaturvedi arrived—the Chief Conservator as much himself in the city as in the jungles, his beret pushed to the back of his head, his check shirt of the kind that could be seen half a mile away. Mrs. Chaturvedi, on the other hand, whom we had hitherto seen only in the simple white cotton *saris* she wore in the forest rest-houses, had assumed a new radiance in white silk, gold-threaded, with diamond ear-rings, and flowers in her hair; though she was perhaps more truly herself in her jungle simplicity, for she has no love for the cities.

For a while the Chaturvedis and our host and hostess and Jean sat in a huddle and talked among themselves, whilst the Lucknow press inquired what I thought of Pakistan, the British Labour Government, and what did I think of modern Indian poetry. . . .

Occasionally I glanced wistfully across to the party chatting easily at the other side of the room; eventually Jean caught my eye, murmured something to the Chief, and he suddenly swung his chair round, pulled it forward, and became part of the press-conference circle.

"You all know Mr. Chaturvedi, Chief Conservator of Forests of the U.P.—" I said.

'Chats' gave one of his all-embracing glances round the circle, and began:

"I must tell you about the man-eater I shot at Dhikala a few weeks ago. . . ."

How he demolished them and their trends, how he demolished all literature and all politics—the tiger and his beautiful stripes—that was what mattered! It was magnificent! The man and the tiger, the flapping of the elephant's trunk in warning 'when we entered the *nullah* and saw the tiger on a ledge of rock above us'—the elephant called Lightning, the perfect *shikar* elephant, standing steady as a rock, the *mahaout* who had 'no regard for his own life and very little for mine'; the shot that knocked the tiger over, the follow-up shot that finished him off. . . .

The *shikari's* voice growing shrill with excitement, his eyes flashing—almost you could hear the deep melancholy *ah-humm* of the tiger, smell the hot dry animal smell of the elephant-grass at sun-down. The tremendous zest and vitality of the man—the whole room was charged with it—larger than lifesize he seemed in a room full of puppets; a Person among people. . . . To hell with all press-conferences, all literature, all politics, all newspapers, all journalists; let us talk of something that really matters; let us talk of that gallant gentleman, *the tiger*. . . .

It was one of the rare occasions in life when one wants to get up and cheer.

He went soon after that. But he had wrecked the press-conference. It was superb.

'At this point Mr. Chaturvedi took over,' one of the papers reported, bleakly, next day. . . .

One of the papers described me as 'sandy-haired' (my hair certainly by that time was full of sand) and tacked a year on to my age. They got a number of things incorrectly. In reply to a question I had said that I thought the mass of English people were sympathetic to the New India; this was transcribed as 'averse' to. My statement that I regretted that the Congress government was holding Communists and those merely suspected of being, without trial, under a Security Act, was headlined; 'Noted Author says Monstrous to Hold Man without Trial.'

One of the most depressing aspects of the New India is the complacency with which this suppression of the opposition is accepted—and even approved of. To the suggestion that this is what the Nazis did they reply that India is 'not ready for democracy'. To the suggestion that there was a great outcry concerning anti-democratic methods and injustice when the British held Congress leaders without trial during the nationalist struggle, they reply that this is different; the Communists are saboteurs; they tear up the railway-sleepers and wreck trains; to the suggestion that the police are there to arrest criminals, who can then be charged and tried through the normal machinery of the law, they reply that society must be protected—which is what Hitler said when he rounded up the Jews and the Left.

The long exhausting day concluded with its somehow having been arranged that I would give a radio talk.

Late that night we spread our bedding on the provided bedsteads and believed that we should sleep like the dead; but we had not been provided with mosquito nets, and the mosquitoes had other ideas. . . .

We heard a clock strike four, and at five o'clock the sun shot up in that sudden way it has in the tropics, and a barefooted bearer brought us *chota hazri* of tea and bananas.

We had been firm about no schools or colleges in Lucknow; we wanted, we said, to walk the streets, the bazaars, get the feel of the place. At nine o'clock we were whisked off in a 'brake', in charge of a uniformed gentleman with top boots, to be shown the 'historic monuments' of the town.

As we rattled along a main street, our guide said, "Here we have a street of commercial buildings of no architectural interest. Ahead of us we have the Iron Bridge, so-called because it is, as you can see, constructed of iron. There we have the Picture Gallery, so-called because the pictures are kept there."

"Overhead," I murmured, "we have the telegraph wires."

It turned out that this gentleman was a Moslem and very learned scholar concerning ancient monuments; he was a Pandit, and the chief custodian of the Nawab Asif-ud-daula's Immambara, known as the Great Immambara. He had written a guide-book all about the historical buildings of Lucknow, and he was very patient with two impatient memsahibs, and much, much too painstaking. No museums, I had said, as firmly as I had said no schools, but it did not prevent him from taking us into museums. Quoting from his guide-book, which is what he did himself, "The Great Immambara was built in the year of terrible famine in A.D. 1784, and was partly undertaken in order to provide the starving population with bread" . . . The main hall in which the Nawar Asafuddaulla and his Begum are buried is 163 feet in length, breadth 53 feet and 49 feet in height, and is said to be the largest vaulted hall in the world. The building is constructed throughout of solid masonry, 'unassisted by the use of any timber'.

We climbed up some steep broken stairs and came out on to a flat roof with arcades on all four sides with ornate arches on the outer side, through which there are very fine views out over the town and the surrounding countryside. We were afterwards taken to the Husainabad Immambara, or Palace of Light, a white plaster imitation of the Taj Mahal, a quite excessively vulgar 19th century construction which looks like something out of a Wembley exhibition. There is a tank with a bridge across it, and a monument of a white horse—the Prophet's horse—and there are palms and cypresses and a great many aspidistras, and inside the mosque itself a great many chandeliers, which make a small tinkly noise when the wind moves their glass pendants, and a lot of dangling strips of tinsel. The chandeliers give their name to the place, and symbolise the Moslem emergence from the darkness of persecution into the light. As Mr. Huxley found the Taj Mahal vulgar one can only hope he was spared this preposterous travesty of it. The Turkish or Western Gate of the Great Immambara is an astonishing shell-shaped affair which looks as though it has been stuck all round its great arch with golden spikes.

When we came down from the arcades the day was very hot, and the inevitable midday dust-storm was blowing. . . . We were shown other mosques and mausoleums, but there is a limit to how many 'historic monuments' one can take in in one morning, and this conducted tour was anyhow not our idea of how to set about it. One takes in more by seeing less. What Lucknow is like as a town we have no idea.

After the radio talk we were allowed a few hours to ourselves in which to write letters. A number of people arrived in the cool of the evening to meet the English author. A poet in a gleaming white *dhoti* arrived in a bicycle-rickshaw, but as we were sitting in the dusk on a long verandah, and he and I were at opposite ends and no one brought him over to me, we can hardly be said to have met. . . .

In the evening we were taken by car to the zoological gardens and dumped there with the young man who referred to himself as a fellow-author. We walked up and down in the moonlight listening to the roar of the wild beasts, and felt sad. So near to their cool jungles, yet so far from them! The fellow-author talked interminably of Communism, and inquired was it not very pleasant to walk and talk thus 'in our beautiful Indian moonlight'? Surely in England we did not experience such moonlight? We replied, wearily, that on the contrary in England we did a very good line in moonlight. When the rest of the party arrived we called upon our host to corroborate this as he had been two years at Oxford, but he declared that no, not in all that time had he seen moonlight, but fog, oh yes, very much fog. . . .

Then we all sat on the burnt-up dusty grass and discussed English literature (O God, O Montreal!) after which we went back to the house and sat on the flat roof and discussed mangoes—mostly.

And at seven in the morning we left for Benares, an eight-hour tedious journey in a hot and crowded train, but at least it wasn't a night-journey. The fellow-author saw us off. We left without ever having set foot in Lucknow, and determined not to be similarly 'cheated' in the ancient and sacred city of Benares.

V

BENARES

WE had no idea what was to happen to us when we arrived at Benares; in Lucknow we had been told, merely, that 'something would be arranged'. When we extricated ourselves from the train compartment—and extricated is the word, Indian railway coaches being as difficult to get out of as into, more often than not—a white-clad young man thrust forward from the seething yelling mob on the platform and demanded that I excuse him but was I Ethel Mannin.

On receiving my admission he smiled, stared, and then somehow or other the waves of the crowd washed over him and we never saw him again. Not that we could be concerned with looking for him, for having battled our way out of the compartment with such of our baggage as two pairs of hands could carry we had somehow to rescue the rest—a problem complicated by the fact that whilst people were still trying to get out of the compartment others were no less determinedly trying to get in, and not merely themselves but their coolies complete with the towering piles of boxes, trunks, and rolls of bedding balanced on their heads . . . and to add to the confusion the endless weaving to and fro of the crowds with their shrill cries, their thin sinuous thrusting bodies, their persistent hands, supplicating or offering . . . and over and above all the sort of heat which you cannot bear but from which there is no escape. . . .

Whilst we were still, as it seemed to us, being torn limb from limb in the mêlée, a tall angry-looking gentleman in a white linen suit and white topee was heard to observe in tones of only narrowly suppressed irritation that he was here to meet Ethel Mannin. It was impossible to see whom he addressed, but I grabbed Jean and we presented our dirty, sweating and bedraggled selves to his immaculateness. Neither by word nor manner did he declare himself pleased to meet us, nor did he trust we had had a pleasant journey. He merely inquired, with a glance at the battered bundles at our feet, if we had all our luggage, and when we replied that we had, turned towards the staircase leading up from the platform. He carried a swagger-cane under one arm, and every now and then when someone got in his way he gave him a jab in the back or the ribs with it. We glanced at each other apprehensively; he seemed to us a very frightening European-style gentleman.

We followed him across a bridge and down some steps and into a large and shining car, the interior of which was like an oven. So far as we could make out our coolies were dealt with by one of his orderlies.

The Burning Ghats, Benares; bodies awaiting the pyre

Certainly we had no more to do with them. He got into the front of the car and we drove off. We felt that he ought to have told us who he was and where he was taking us. We had been eight hours sitting bolt upright in a hot and overcrowded cattle-truck of a compartment, tormented by flies, climbed over by half-naked children, and deafened by their ceaselessly chattering mothers, and we felt a weak need for human kindness. Even if we were only asked once again if it was our first visit to India it would be something. . . .

Finally I observed, with the fatuousness of despair, that it was much hotter here than in Lucknow. To which he replied curtly that we must expect it hot here now. We continued through the dust and the glare in silence.

When the car drew up at the verandah of a white bougainvillea-covered house we had no idea whether it was a private residence, a club, a government hostel, or a hotel. It proved to be the latter, and English at that. Had we but known, a room had been reserved for us in the guest-house of the Hindu University, but the letter acquainting us of this had not reached us.

When we turned to thank the European-style gentleman for the transport, he unexpectedly smiled and murmured something about seeing us 'later'. Encouraged by this amiability we said that we had to go to the Hindu University to collect our mail and meet a friend. He immediately looked concerned. The University was some way out, he said. How did we propose to reach there? I replied, vaguely, that I supposed we would get a *tonga* . . . and looked wistfully at his car. He also looked at his car. "I could send a truck up for you," he said. I murmured that it would be very kind of him . . . He saluted and marched off with his cane under his arm, and we never saw him again. But he kept his word about the truck.

The hotel seemed to exude weariness, the weariness of something over and done with but still there from sheer inertia, because no one has bothered to clear it away; weariness seemed to drip from the wilting aspidistras, seep out of the dark interiors and faded Victorian photographs on the walls, out of the shabby creaking wicker chairs. In the great empty spaces of the dining-room there was a decrepit, old Indian waiter; the proprietress, jaded, perhaps, as much from ennui as the heat, told us that she wanted to sell the hotel, because India was 'not what it was, now they've got this independence'. I had the feeling that presently the hotel would be closed up, like the house in *The Cherry Orchard*, and the old waiter shut in with it, like the old servant in the play. . . .

By the time we had washed and had tea the truck had come for us, and we set out for the University.

'The Benares Hindu University is about four miles from the city. It has cost over a *crore* of rupees. All the Hindu Princes of India have

Nongpoh, Assam
Shillong, capital of Assam, built Japanese-style

given money towards its upkeep. The students come from all parts of India.'

So says the little guide-book, with admirable simplicity and precision. Whilst the writer was at it, however, he might have added that it is immense, that it is a city of itself, with motor-roads, and staff-houses set in gardens, and its own post-office, and in process of building its own temple. The students live in enormous blocks of buildings built round grassy courtyards; there is a covered balcony to each floor, so that it is possible to walk right round each block from any level.

We spent nearly two hours driving from building to building trying to find the young Professor of Ceramics who had our mail and who, though we did not then know it, had arranged for us to stay in the university guest-house. No one seemed to have heard of him. It was also holiday time, the festival of *Holi* began the next day, and many people were away. We finally traced him at the post-office—there was a postman who remembered delivering letters to him; he was a Madrasi, he said. We drove off again and eventually found the block in which he lived—only to discover that he was not there. We wrote a message on a scrap of paper to be pushed under his door and drove back into the city feeling despondent, for if he had gone away for the holidays he might be gone for much longer than we could afford to wait in Benares.

On the way back into the city we passed a shabby white neglected-looking temple swarming with monkeys. We learned later that it was 'the monkey temple'. The monkeys have the free run of it, inside and out. When they become too numerous they are rounded up and sent by train to other parts of the country—in some districts special monkey-trains are run periodically. Many of the wretched little deportees die on the journey; the others are dumped in the forests and jungles, but being town-bred they do not know how to fend for themselves in these conditions, and the panther gets a good many of them. From Benares a shipment of monkeys had at that time just been sent to an American zoo. The monkey is sacred to the Hindu and must not be killed, though the alternatives so often encompass its death, most miserably—as with the sacred cow, turned adrift when it is no longer useful to its owner, to be devoured by tigers in the jungles or starve in the city streets.

Back at the hotel in the cantonment we ate English food for the first time for more than two months, and even when smothered with pepper it still tasted insipid to the point of tastelessness—though the taste always seems to vanish from English food when cooked by Indian chefs. The silence in the dining-room was impressive. And the smallness of the world was once again asserted by the fact that the solitary English army officer at the far end of the room proved to be the army-doctor son of the family doctor of my childhood. . . .

Outside on the verandah a young man in a *dhoti* squatted patiently beside a collection of ivory elephants and paper-knives, brassware, and cheap jewellery. All the way through dinner, and all the time we sat talking afterwards with the major—who told us of a Nepalese temple in Benares of, he said, 'incredible obscenity'—we had him on our conscience, for we knew that if we delayed till midnight he would still be there, and we should not buy, because all he had to offer were useless knick-knacks, a junk of 'souvenirs', which only people addicted to the acquisition of clutter—which we are not—could possibly want.

As at Constitution House, New Delhi, our room was across the garden, in a single-storeyed block with a verandah all round. It was the usual high-ceilinged room, with a fan like an aeroplane propeller suspended from the ceiling, and at which we looked, as always, a little fearfully. As this was a European hotel the bathroom had a bath-tub, into which a bearer emptied jugs of hot water—"You tell me when one bath finish and I bring water for second bath." These Europeans who sit, disgustingly, in their bath-water . . . For the rest there were the usual lizards on the walls and the usual cockroaches on the floors and the usual turbanned figures squatting on the verandah steps and rising to *Salaam* us every time we went in or out.

In the midst of our despondency the young Professor turned up with our mail, having received our message at the University. We rejected his suggestion of transferring to the university guest-house—having only just unpacked. Like so many Indians who speak English only to each other he had a little difficulty in understanding our native English, and the conversation was not easy, but it was finally mutually understood that he would return in the morning, early, before the day became too hot, with a friend from the University, and they would take us in a car they had arranged to borrow for the occasion to Sarnath, made famous by Gautama the Buddha, who is reputed to have begun his preaching there 600 B.C. . . . A *stupa*—shrine—is supposed to mark the exact spot where his ministry began.

Sarnath is four miles from the city of Benares, and is the scene of important and extensive archaelogical work. The site of a monastery and the remains of an Asoka pillar have been excavated, and a number of 'umbrella' *stupas*. There is a museum in which the finds from the excavations are housed. Our young friends were very painstaking, and when we had been shown all the excavations we were shown everything in the museum—fragments of *stupas*, fragments of Buddhas, pieces of masonry, fragments neatly arranged along long, long tables; fragments in glass cases; fragments arranged along the verandah outside the museum, and our young friends so careful, so conscientious, so patient . . . and we so Western and impatient, and the day growing hot so soon, with the dreadful hot high wind called the *loe* blowing up the dust in whirling dust-storms. . . .

We were taken into a Japanese temple at the top of a broad flight of steps. By the door there was a bookstall, and behind the stall a young man intoned endlessly; his voice had a curious hollow bell-like sound in the bare empty temple. There were paintings depicting the life of Gautama round the walls—the story of the renunciation of the world, of his riches, his wife, his family, of the great Prince Siddartha who was to become the Buddha. A great golden Buddha was enshrined on an altar at the far end of the temple, and flowers had been scattered at the base of the altar and on the steps.

We visited also a Chinese temple, with a peaceful garden in front of it. Here in a room opening off the garden a priest intoned and beat upon a small drum. In the temple itself there was a small altar with paper and wax flowers flanking the contemplative figure of the Buddha, and again the pictures round the walls. The atmosphere was cool and quiet and contemplative, and it was pleasant to linger there out of the heat of the day. . . .

A Jain temple, on the other hand, was crowded and cluttered, from floor to ceiling. It would be easy to mistake a Jain temple for a Buddhist one, nevertheless, from the paintings round the walls and the reposeful presiding figure seated in the familiar 'lotus position'. The Buddha-like figure, however, is Vardhamana—Mahavira, 'the great hero'—the last of the twenty-four Thirthankaras, meaning ford-finders, who founded the religion. He is also known as Jina, the conqueror, from which name comes Jaina, and Jainism. Mahavira was contemporary with Siddartha, and he also was a prince, and he also renounced wealth and position to live by the begging-bowl. He did not preach to the masses as did Siddartha, but to kings and princes and intellectuals, and Jainism is to this day not a popular religion, though it has much in common—besides the life and renunciation of Mahavira—with Buddhism.

The most rigid rule of Jainism is abstention from taking life—even insect life. Jain monks cover their mouths with cloth to avoid swallowing tiny flies.

It would be interesting to know how they 'get round' walking on the ground, where they are far more liable to kill insects than by leaving their mouths uncovered. It is said that Jains who can afford to do so pay poor people to sleep in their beds before retiring to them themselves so that the bed-bugs may be fed to repletion in advance. The Jains will not even eat certain vegetables which are considered to be 'alive'. They are, in short, the super pacifists, the supreme exponents of the Gandhian principle of *ahimsa*, or non-violence.

A sect of Jainist monks go naked, because they refuse all possessions. Religious suicide is permitted to those who qualify for it by a minimum period of mortification of the flesh which includes complete celibacy, and abstention from all worldly possessions. Religious suicide does not permit of violence; the seeker of this sanctioned short-cut to Nirvana must die from starvation and exposure. Vardhamana is

The orange-market, Nagpur, Central Provinces

said to have achieved Nirvana in life, in which state of abstraction he 'saw and knew all conditions in the whole world of living beings'.

Like the Buddhists, the Jains do not recognise God as First Cause; they have a pantheon of gods, like the Hindus, but these gods are inferior to the Thirthankaras, and have to work out their Nirvana through a series of reincarnations, like human beings, whom they neither help nor hinder in the matter. Worship of the gods and the Thirthankaras is recommended, on the principle that all worship is good for the soul.

This is only an indication of this subtle and esoteric religion, concerning which there are conflicting accounts.[1]

When we first arrived in Benares and were asked, almost immediately, if we were 'going on the river in the morning', we did not understand. Did one, then, take a rowing-boat out on Mother Ganges as though it were Father Thames?

"Is that," I asked, in my innocence, "what one does here?"

The hotel lady explained.

"You get up early in the morning, about six or earlier and take a *tonga* down to the river. Then you go out in a boat and watch the Hindus bathing from the *ghats*. You see them burning the dead there, too."

The burning *ghats*; ah, yes . . . somewhere one seemed to have heard, to have read something. . . .

We did not, in point of fact, go to the river in the early morning, but at midday. Sarnath, our young man said, called for the cool of the day; the river would give us coolness from the day's heat. It was true there would be fewer crowds there then, but still it would be the same spectacle.

We expressed a desire to visit the brass-market and the silk-market —Benares being famous for its wonderful gold and silver thread embroidered *sari* silks. We therefore left the car in a crowded main street of the old city and turned into an alleyway of the bazaar. It was the usual story of dense crowds, beggars, swarming flies, wandering cows, gutters full of garbage, tall and often beautiful old wooden houses with crumbling ornate balconies, the usual white-clad predominance of males. What was not usual, however, was the Arabian Nights' splendour of the silks offered in the open-fronted shops on those alleyways of streets—silks of incredible brilliance and fineness, silks interwoven with gold and silver thread in exquisite patterns of stars and flowers, silks with broad bands of gold and silver at their edges, silk of the colours of Eastern dawns and sunsets, Eastern birds and flowers, silks irridescent with the sheen of peacock feathers, silks of the translucence of tropic seas and skies. Silks, in fact, which were

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[1] The information given here is taken from P. Thomas's *Hindu Religions and Custom* (Taraporevala Sons & Co., Ltd., Bombay).

The author and her daughter in the jungles of the Central Provinces the shimmering substance of a dream. We gazed at them raptly, with longing, but always the thought came to us that such silks were not for European dresses, however gracefully modelled; they were essentially *sari* silks, belonging to Eastern costume as essentially as do the *lehs* of jasmine and tuber-roses.

If the brass-market disappointed it was only because we came to it with that common but mistaken belief that 'Benares work' is coloured and ornate brasswork, whereas it is in fact quite plain. The elaborately engraved and coloured brass goods come from Moradabad.

From the brass-market we entered an even narrower alleyway where the shops became mere booths and finally gave way on one side to the walls of the great Golden Temple, the most sacred spot in sacred Benares . . . and the high spot for beggars. They squat on the ground under the wall so close that their shoulders touch, a long line of them, both men and women, all with their bowls and tins held out for rice or coins, some blind, some hideously maimed, but many whole. At night they sleep in a beggars' colony at the top of one of the *ghats*, crawling like rats into any hole they can find, their favourite haunts being under the raised flooring of booths, or under carts. Others lie out in the open, on the steps, even by day. We saw a number there, travesties of human beings, mere skeletons with a covering of skin—like all the most dreadful famine photographs one has ever seen.

The line of beggars in the alleyway leading up to the great temple is heart-hardening in its blatant professionalism, but these incredibly still living bodies which lie about on the steps of the *ghats* ravage the heart with pity and horror. The sight is intolerable, but even more intolerable is Eastern complacency regarding this cancer in the social body, the acceptance of it as incurable and inevitable.

Benares is to the devout Hindu what Rome is to the devout Catholic and Mecca to the Mohammedan. It is the dream of every practising Hindu to make a pilgrimage to Benares at least once during his lifetime. Rich Hindus suffering from incurable diseases come to Benares to die—there is a 'hotel for the dying' close to the great burning *ghat*, the waters of Mother Ganges laving its walls. 'A Christian,' writes Mr. P. Thomas, in his book on *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners*, 'can have no idea of the feelings of a Hindu pilgrim on beholding Benares. Every inch of ground, the grass that grows in the city, the pebbles and dust of the roads, the wells and tanks, and above all the waters of the Ganges that flow past it, are so sacred as to remove all sins and traces of sins from a Hindu. Every pious Hindu wishes to die in Benares . . . Hindus in their old age flock to Benares from all over India for the pleasure of dying in the holy city . . . the number of pilgrims that come into and go out of the city form a floating population as big as the permanent population of the city.' Mr. Thomas says that Benares is computed to have over two thousand temples. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says fifteen hundred.

The Golden Temple was packed, and as we were not, as Europeans, allowed to enter this Hindu Holy of Holies, a priest suggested to our companions that we should go up into the building opposite if we wished to have a good view. This we did, and climbed some steep stairs above a flower-shop which sold *lehs* for pilgrims to place on the temple shrines, and emerged upon a narrow balcony on a level with the bee-hive shaped gilded copper domes which give the temple its name. There was a smell of incense, and the sound of chanting, a thin tinkle of bells. We had noticed when we had peeped from the alleyway that the marble pavement inside the temple was wet from a constant pouring of holy water into pilgrim hands. The holy 'Well of Knowledge' is close by, and a Brahmin sits all day by the well drawing the sacred water and pouring it into the hands of pilgrims and the brass vessels they bring in which to collect it to take it to their homes. To take back some holy water is an essential part of a pilgrimage to Benares.

We took some photographs of the golden domes, and when we turned to leave the balcony the priest who had escorted us thrust small blossoms into our hands and demanded four rupees. He was extremely indignant about the few annas he received, and we in turn were so disgusted that we flung his flowers back at him. He had attached himself to us unasked and done precisely nothing for us. We had imagined that being in the company of Hindus we should be spared this by then all too familiar racket.

We had a similar experience when we visited the mosque close by. When we came down from a minaret we had ascended a *mullah* hung *lehs* round our necks and then coolly demanded five rupees, and when, supported by our vehement protests the young men refused, a similar altercation followed.

We came at last to the *ghats* with a feeling of escape.

The great *ghats* of Benares present an astonishing, an almost indescribable, sight from the river. They consist of high and wide flights of steps down to the water. Piled up above them in tiers are gilded domes and spires, the minarets of the mosque, and a conglomeration of tall old houses with arched windows and doorways and ornate shabby wooden eaves and balconies, palaces and tenements jumbled together in Oriental confusion. To say that the steps swarm with people is an understatement; they are packed with people, dense white-clad male crowds, with the occasional brilliance of a woman's brightly coloured *sari*. The sacred and profane mingles—as always in the East. A man squats on a step being shaved; nearby a Brahmin squats on a low platform in the water, a palm-leaf umbrella above him—ready to bless the devout and receive alms. The umbrellas of the Brahmins are everywhere—'Our so-called holy men', one of our companions observes, ironically, as our boatman rows us past.

The murky-looking water of the river is full of bathers who wade in from the steps. The men are stripped to the waist; the women enter the water modestly in their *saris*.

"You wash all your sins away in the Ganges," says our scornful young sceptic. "If you are devout enough you even drink it—in spite of all the dead bodies thrown into it!"

"I take it you wouldn't?"

They both laugh.

"Certainly not!"

"We are not orthodox."

"Would you say that orthodoxy was on the wane—like *purdah* and arranged marriages?"

"Among the young people, yes."

They are agreed upon this. One says that his father is always demanding of him why does he not bathe in the Ganges, but he does not do it. They both laugh, derisively, as youth does in revolt against the older generation.

The other says, "People come from all over India to Benares to bathe in the Ganges, and we live here but do not come."

The fact appears to afford them satisfaction.

We come to the great Manikarnika *ghat*. On the steps, near the bottom, are laid several stretchers; they are not laid horizontally along the steps, but vertically across them, and look as though they would quite easily slide into the water. Below them are a row of small pyres, fashioned of logs laid criss-cross; men are busy arranging the faggots. We row in close to the steps and see that corpses are strapped to the stretchers; the outlines of the bodies are delineated clearly under the thin white muslin covering; the feet thrust out pitifully—the stiff, claw-like feet of the dead.

On some of the stretchers a few flowers have been sprinkled. There appear to be no mourners, and when we comment on this our companions say, a little bitterly, "these are poor people". Wealthy Hindus hire mourners to stay by the pyre until it is burnt out; for the poor, one pyre has to do for several cremations, with the result that rather more than the ashes is thrown into Mother Ganges. At a certain stage of the burning the skull is split with an axe—to release the soul—after which the mourners, if any, can go home and get on with their post-funeral purifications. For ten days after a death has occurred in a house the family are considered unclean, and no food may be cooked in the house. We watched one of the stretchers carried to the pyre; one of the men attending the pyre turned back a corner of the shroud and looked at the face, then covered it over again. The body was laid on the pyre, and faggots laid on top of it.

Jean adjusted her camera. The boatman glancing over his shoulder at the movement behind him said something to our companions. One of them translated:

"He says you should not take a picture."

But it was too late.

A large boat full of people drew in alongside ours. In the bottom of the boat lay a body in its winding-sheet. We pulled out and rowed away. The boatman inquired did we want to see more, but we had all had enough. Our young friends admitted they were depressed.

"It is dreadful," one said.

"Not the cremation itself," I suggested, "but the crude way it is done here. We have cremation in England."

That was something neither of them knew. I went on to describe our own dignified, unobtrusive method, in which there is nothing gruesome, and which can even be imbued with beauty. Both said that they would like to come to England, and we got away from the subject of death. Across the river a sand-storm swirled and eddied along the foreshore. The day was very hot. The Brahmins sat impassively on their little platforms under their palm-leaf umbrellas gazing into eternity.

"By their patience they hope to ensure a safe and sure way into heaven," observed the more cynical of our two friends.

We wandered back through the narrow crowded streets, the way blocked as much by wandering cows and goats as by human beings, and nothing would satisfy the two young men but that we must sit at a café with them and drink what they assured us would be a cool and refreshing curd drink. They completely overruled our nervous European tendency to hanker after something 'safe' in a bottle. If we had never had this curd speciality, they insisted, now was the time to sample it. . . .

With the utmost misgivings we allowed them to conduct us to one of the many cafés which flanked one side of the street. A few men squatted on benches outside; some wooden steps gave access to the interior. At the top of the steps, just inside the café, a man with two boys as assistants squatted beside an urn; there was a tap with a piece of rubber tubing from which water gushed continuously.

There were long wooden benches and tables, and a number of men lolling and squatting on the benches. There were no women. The men stared at us with a kind of indifference, as they stared at the swarming flies, and at the hot glare of the street. The flies rose in the familiar buzzing black swarm from a table at the far end as we approached it. One of the young men turned on a fan, which pounded round, slowly at first with a heavy chug-chug-chug, then accelerated and became invisible in its speed, and the flies scattered. A very loud radio churning out a popular song with a rhythm like that of a rumba was so deafening that I begged one of the young men to ask the proprietor if it might be turned off, or anyhow turned lower. The young man got up and switched the radio off. Immediately the man squatting beside the urn got up and turned it on again, then without any comment returned to his place. One of his assistants strolled over and took our order.

The concoction, whatever it was, took a long time to prepare. There was much rinsing of glasses under the perpetually gushing water—in fact no English pub ever cleanses glasses with half as much thoroughness. After that the urn gushed white fluid but I could not see into what, and it was still sometime after the urn had been brought into action that four tall glasses of pink stuff were set in front of us, stuck with straws. The drink was ice-cold and milky; the pink stuff was evidently a fruit flavouring. It was excessively sweet. For our taste there was much too much of it for anything so sweet, but it was a point of pride with us to 'show willing' on all occasions. When in India do as the Indians do and like it. We liked it, resolutely.

We dined in the University on the eve of *Holi*, the most popular of all Hindu festivals. It is the feast of spring and of the full moon—that Indian March moon which seems to give out a silver heat as positively as the sun gives out a golden one. It is the feast of colour-throwing. Children and young people parade the streets in gangs with buckets and syringes squirting coloured waters at each other. People put on their oldest shirts and *dhotis* (women are spared) before venturing on to the streets. During this unpleasant carnival clothes which begin the day a snowy white end by being coats of many colours, red, blue, purple, yellow, green. Most unpleasant of all, the oily colours are squirted even into people's hair and faces. People who cannot afford to buy colours for the occasion fling mud and tar at each other, and every year the newspapers are full of police arrests in minor riots caused by this hooliganism.

In the University the students stage pitched battles on the morning of *Holi*. But even on the eve of the festival the colour-throwing begins in the hot bright moonlight. Great mounds of branches, palms, cow-dung, stand everywhere at street corners in readiness for the bonfires which the people dance round, and even jump through. Sir James Frazer[1] gives *Holi* as a fire-festival, though it is sometimes referred to as a fertility festival. According to this great authority fire-festivals procure fertility through the destruction of evil spells which stand in the way of it; but they are also purificatory. In Northern India, he says, the people believe that the fires prevent blight and that the ashes cure disease. He says that *Holi* may be regarded as akin to the European fire-customs of Midsummer's Eve, the Yule Log, Twelfth Day eve, and so on. Ribald or even obscene songs are sung, sometimes by the women, and phallic emblems carried, but the customs vary in different parts of the country.

The children dress up like our children on Guy Fawkes Day, and knock on street doors and demand sweets. Parties, mostly male, engage in street-dancing of a curiously primitive Negroid character—a hopping up and down and a waggling of buttocks and suggestive writhing of bellies, to a rhythm beaten out by hand on oblong drums, quite unlike any other traditional form of Indian dancing.

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[1] In *The Golden Bough*, vol. II of *Baldar the Beautiful.*

Travelling by train during *Holi* it is necessary to keep the windows closed, and the wire-mesh screen with which every Indian railway-compartment window is provided drawn over the glass, as protection against the mud—with an admixture of stones as often as not—which children lacking colours but infected with the carnival spirit gaily fling from vantage points along the line.

On one station, when a gang of young people came on to the platform, smothered with colours on their clothes and faces and hair, banging on their drums and singing and generally causing a commotion, a ticket-inspector remarked to me, as I stood at the door of the compartment watching, "This is what comes of independence! When your people were here it would not have been allowed on the station. Now there is no discipline!"

The class which toadied to the British is still there, and is every bit as quick as the white remnants of the old régime to blame all ills and all misconduct, even *Holi* high spirits, on to 'this independence'.

We dined in a small private room, belonging to one of the students, in the University, and were waited on by a child of about seven or eight, naked to the waist. He was barelegged and barefooted and had a sacred cord round his neck. He carried the numerous dishes from another block across the compound, up the stairs to the first floor of the block in which we dined, along the covered verandah to the room. He stared at the white memsahibs with the utmost wonder, with a kind of awe, but when we smiled his solemn withdrawn little face seemed to open out into a brown radiance, and he did not find us more completely fascinating than we found him in his table-boy gravity—which dissolved leaving him all child when he smiled.

On the assurance that we liked Indian food we had been promised a 'real Indian' meal—but some of the dishes proved too highly spiced even for our Indian hosts. For ourselves we had been prepared to go on 'burning our vitals', as one of our hosts put it, so long as they did, in accordance with our general 'when-in-India' policy.

After excellent coffee in a café near the University we were driven to the station through streets swarming with the white figures of excited students in *Holi* mood. On the platform various other men joined our two hosts. Just as the train was about to start a young man we had seen only briefly at the University—though it was his room being used for the dinner-party—jumped into our compartment and hung *lehs* of marigolds round our necks.

"In our country this means peace," he said.

One of the party to whom we had recounted the incident at the mosque flashed back, "I hope you don't want five rupees for it!"

So amid flowers and laughter, and with some half dozen pairs of slender brown hands raised and clasped in the prayer gesture, the beautiful Hindu greeting and farewell, we left the ancient and holy city of Benares. As the train moved out slowly over the bridge across the Ganges we took a last look at the domes and spires and minarets, the tall old houses and palaces, rising tier on tier in huddled confusion above the broad sweep of the *ghats*, all purified and etherealised in the tremendous Indian moonlight—'the saddest city in the world', the city of death, but also, so millions believe, a pilgrims'-way to eternal life.

A Gond encampment in the jungles of the Central Provinces

I

DARJEELING

We travelled from Calcutta to Siliguria—from which a little mountain train spends six hours climbing up to Darjeeling—'inter' class on a sweltering hot night. The long coach with its wooden benches each side and down the middle was packed; there was no question of spreading any bedding, in spite of which here and there a woman had made a space for a child to lie down, and a man on the middle bench contrived to recline by throwing one leg over the back, his bare brown foot wobbling in the faces of those who sat opposite. After looking thoughtfully for a long time at the upper berth, stacked with bundles and rolls of bedding and tin trunks, Jean finally climbed up and made a place for herself. She was the only woman who went aloft, but a number of men had climbed up and had contrived to spread at least part of their bedding.

Before passing through the barrier on to the platform each passenger had to fill in a Customs' form—for the East Pakistan frontier—stating the quantity and nature of baggage and its value in rupees. Bewildered, and with the sweat running down our faces like tears, and our clothes clinging to us like wet bathing suits, we protested helplessly that we had no idea what our baggage was worth. "Put anything—what you like"—said the sweating young man at the other side of the counter. One figure being as good as another we put two hundred rupees, then followed our coolie, who carried a ruck-sack on each arm and two rolls of bedding on his head, to a seemingly already completely full train.

But no Indian train is ever so full that it will not hold newcomers, and, greatly stared at, the two white memsahibs squeezed in. Indians never move up; the art of making a space for yourself in a crowded Indian train or bus—that is tautology, for an Indian train or bus is always crowded—is to edge a part of one buttock on to a seat, and by a slow process of infiltration you eventually find yourself seated. The important thing is to get *in*.

We were travelling 'inter'—which Europeans never, never do—not from masochism or eccentricity but for the very good reason that we had not enough rupees for anything else, first and second-class having been merged into one 'upper' and prohititively expensive class on that line. 'Inter', on the other hand, was quite fantastically cheap.

Between the heat and the crowdedness, and the night-long rauching and spitting, it was a quite horrible journey, and I suffered one of my periodic attacks of revulsion-against-India. 'One can be interested-in but how can one possibly like a country in which eye and ear are so habitually offended?' I wrote in my journal on the way up to

Darjeeling. 'It is a country full of lovely things—temples, palaces, flowers, trees, landscapes—but even in the jungles this terrible poverty reaches out to the consciousness in every tiny grass-hut village. Everywhere, in town and country alike, the mass of people are hungry, and desperately poor, and neglected. Animals and people alike are more than half-starved.' And then, fretfully, 'And this everlasting rauching and spitting, and the utter lack of mutual aid among the people—people resolutely stretched out on seats in overcrowded trains, and women and children doing heavy manual work on the roads—little girls of not more than eight years old tottering about on the roads carrying heavy baskets of stones on their bent backs, women coolies with straps round their foreheads supporting the burdens on their backs. Is British exploitation overthrown only to be replaced by the exploitation of Indians by Indians?'

When the 'train-sickness' had worn off it was possible to reflect that India's problems are vast, from the economic to the educative, and that the bad heritage of the British—of corrupt or toadying officials, and the centuries-old mass-subservience of a subject race—is not to be overthrown with the first assertion of political independence.[1]

There was time for breakfast—theoretically 'European-style'—on the station at Siliguria before boarding the tiny train for the day's journey from the sweltering plain up into the mountain coolness 6000 feet above. For a time the train passes through forests where, for us, the tall *sal* trees were like old friends, rousing in us a nostalgia, always near the surface, for the jungles. A leafless cotton tree blazed with scarlet flowers and was decorated with pure white doves in its topmost branches, scarlet flowers and snowy birds dazzling against the cloudless blue of the sky. One of two English nuns on the train was anxious to explain to us about the various loops and zig-zags of the line, and how the Great Loop was devised by the engineer's wife when the engineer himself was nonplussed as to how to drive the line forward. The panorama of mountain and valley and jungle and tea-gardens of this climb from three hundred to seven thousand feet above sea-level is so terrific that, quite simply, I do not know how to write of it.

The Indian author of a little book entitled, helpfully, *Darjeeling at a Glance*, which we bought on arrival, had no such difficulties, however, and, it would seem, one only has to cultivate the style for description to flow:

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[1] In this connection it is interesting to note what Sir S. Eardley Wilmot wrote as far back as 1911, in his *Forest Life and Sports in India.* He speaks of the centuries of oppression in India, and declares, 'The people are what their rulers and their priesthood have made them, and the introduction of new methods and new laws can but slowly affect the ideas of a vast population. . . . Yet, curiously enough, the introduction of the Western methods and laws does not always bear good fruit; for the more uncivilised the people, and the wilder the life they lead—in short, the greater freedom from oppression—the greater often is their natural truthfulness displayed; for independence doubtless produces as nothing else can self-respect and fearlessness in the individual.'

'Practically speaking, at every turn, beauty fresh and unspeakable reveals itself in a magnificent panorama,' Dr. K. C. Bhanja tells us.

Though he can do better than that when he reaches 'the queen of hill-stations' itself and conducts the reader to the Victoria Bridge and Waterfall. After a prosaic start—'this structure as well as the spectacle are both worth seeing'—he really lets himself go concerning the waterfall: 'But, "Whence, How, and Whither!" is the question. Ponder within yourself—What power is the feeder of this perpetual torrent! From what never-ending and never-wearied sources, the body of water is being supplied! Towards what abyss is being propelled! What receptacle can contain the mighty influx!' (It is permissible to wonder what the good Dr. Bhanja would do if he ever saw and had to write about Niagara—or the Victoria Falls. . . .)

The mighty influx, however, was not putting on a very good show the day we went to look at it, and a shelter overlooking the view by the ferro-concrete bridge was evidently used as a public latrine and was full of ordure.

Of some public gardens laid out on a hill our little book assured us that 'in the springtime, the cuckoo may be heard carolling many a plaintive note. Besides, many beautiful birds may be seen on wanton wings and sporting with delicious flight, and a thousand flowers will be found nodding gaily to each other.'

Dr. Bhanja clearly does not believe in the Chekhovian principle that the best way to describe a sunset is to say that the sun set; or in Gertrude Stein's assertion that 'the way to say it is to say it' (not that she herself ever followed this excellent rule).

We had no 'contacts' in Darjeeling, and no reservation made, so we left our baggage at the station—which is not as simple as it sounds, surrounded as we were by a clamourous mob of female coolies seizing upon our burdens and shouldering them and preparing to trudge off with them to the Y.W.C.A.—because the nun to whom we had spoken on the train had a fixed idea we wanted to go there, and had transferred the idea to the coolies on arrival. Having successfully fought the battle of the coolies, various station orderlies or bearers, and a gaggle of rickshaw men, we tramped resolutely up the hill into the town looking for a place to stay. A hotel called 'The Hindu Hotel' looked, we thought, promising, and whilst we were wondering whether we should climb up to it—for Darjeeling is a series of terraces—we saw an Englishman standing outside a garage and decided to ask his advice.

When we inquired "What about the Hindu Hotel?" he exclaimed, "Good Lord, you can't stay there, that's an Indian show!" and told us of someone who let rooms and who would, he assured us, make us very comfortable.

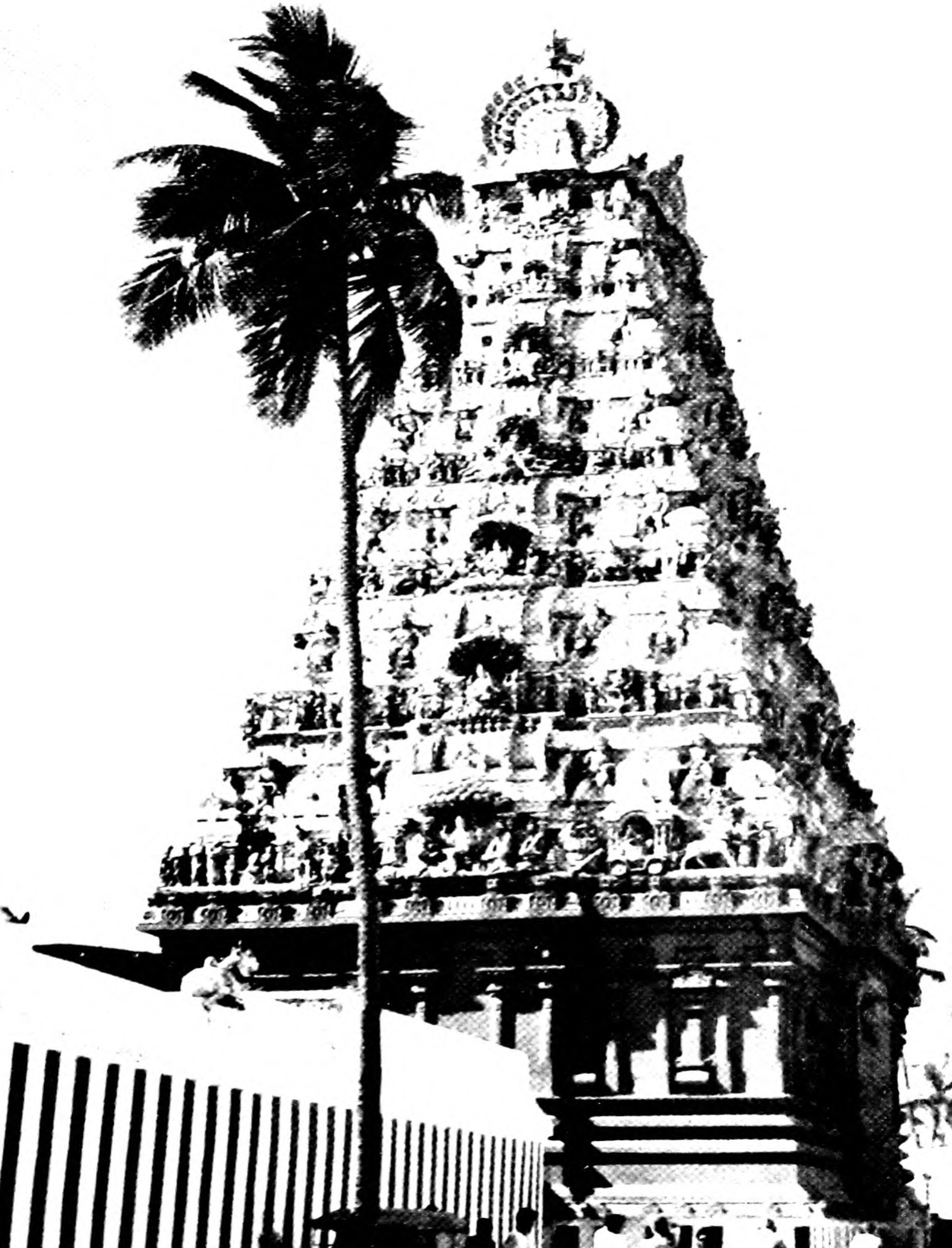
The room was in some 'mansions', commanding, as Dr. Bhanja would say, a fine panorama. As our fellow countryman had been so vehement about our not staying in an 'Indian show' we can only conclude that the handsome young Indian—who proved to be the son of the house—who showed us the room was 'Anglo'; he was certainly very European-style. The room was large and clean, with a bow-window recess looking down into the heart of the town—the market-place. By leaning far out of the window it was possible to see the lower slopes of the Kinchinjunga range; the summits were hidden behind a wall of dense cloud. It was so cold that we rummaged about at the bottom of our rucksacks in search of woollen garments we had until then forgotten.

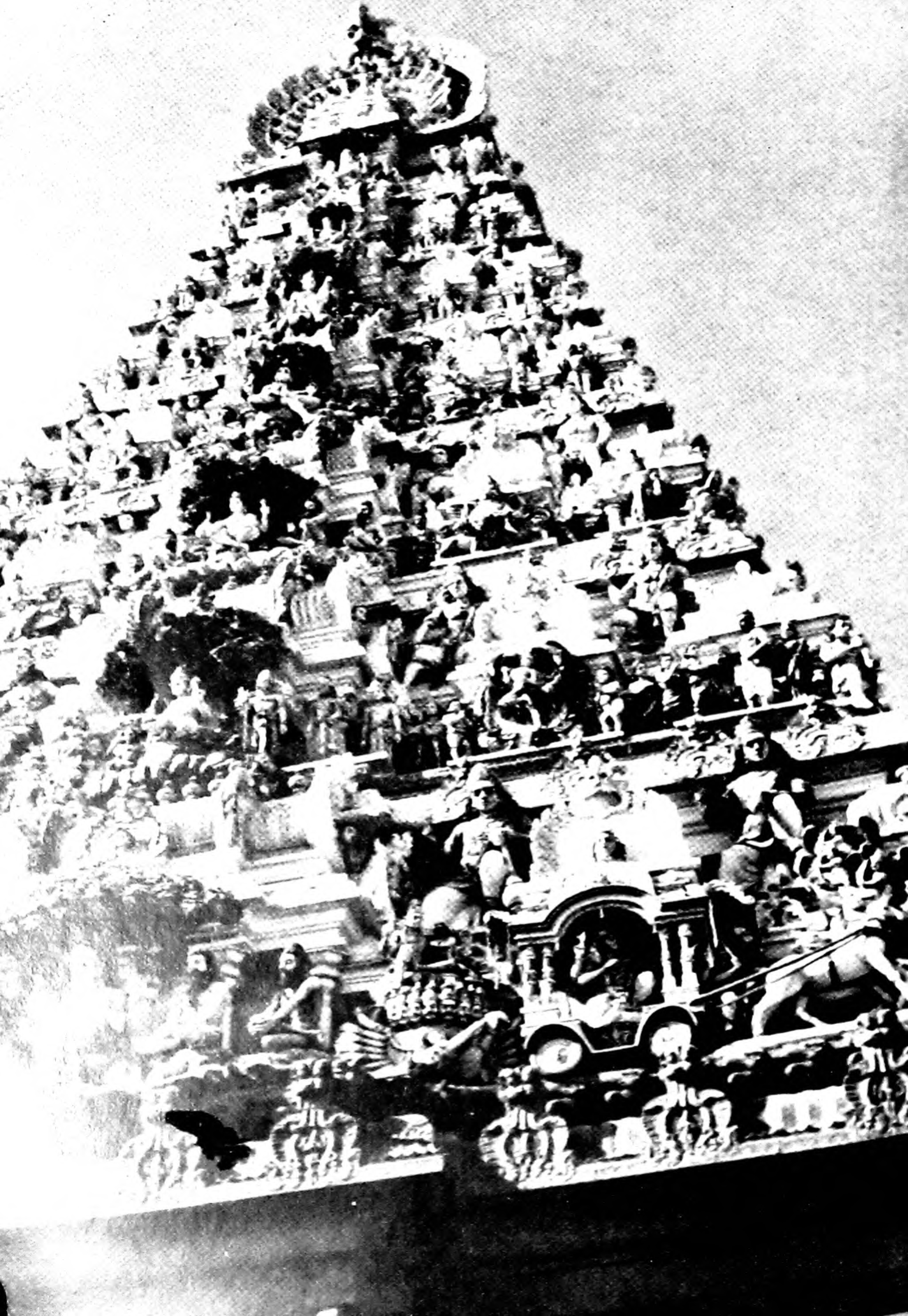
We believed that after two consecutive nights on trains we should sleep like the dead; we fell asleep quickly enough, but were wakened in the early hours of the morning by the most horrifying howling—a kind of mass howling which seemed to come nearer and nearer at great speed until it was immediately below the windows. It set all the dogs in the neighbourhood barking. It was our first experience of jackals, though we had seen them in ones and twos in the jungles. They were evidently after the chickens under the windows of the mansions and surrounding houses.

Despite the Nepalese people, the men with their hair worn in plaits round their heads, the women with huge nose and ear-rings, despite the terraces of tea-gardens, despite the Hindu temple of the Lord Krishna—almost hidden by the strips of prayer-papers fluttering from tall poles and hung on lines like washing, despite the feeling of being on the frontiers of Nepal and Tibet, there is something curiously English about Darjeeling. The shelters on the Observatory Hill are pure Bournemouth; the Chowrasta square at the top of the steep road up from the station is 'commonly known as the Mall'; here are ponies upon which children may ride along the numerous paths of well-laid-out gardens and terraces—it is pure Torquay; here are tea-shops where you may take morning coffee and delicious cakes, or afternoon tea; here is a tea-shop with a large sign, 'Jolly Llama Teas.' The names of the roads and of the houses are English-of-the-English . . . so that you wonder what the brown-skinned flat-faced people walking about in what appear to be dressing-gowns over which the women wear brightly coloured aprons and the men bright sashes—are doing there. Surely the white ladies in tweed suits are more native to the place?

In a tea-shop one morning, having ourselves succumbed to the local decadence of eleven o'clock coffee and cakes, we saw a Buddhist nun; she was elderly, her head was shaved, and she wore a long yellow robe and sandals. She was talking, her accent American, to an Irish priest and two ladies at a nearby table . . . explaining, as she tucked into the cream cakes, that she had to eat before twelve o'clock, as after that she must fast. The priest asked her if she spoke the local language, to which she replied no, but it was not necessary . . . The sound of the Irish voice reminded me that it was St. Patrick's Day.

The Kapâleeswarar Temple, Madras





But we had not gone to Darjeeling to drink morning coffee and eat cream-cakes, any more than to promenade the Torquay-like terraces and gardens; primarily we had come to see the Himalaya at sunrise from the top of Tiger Hill. Which, as it turned out, we never succeeded in doing. This Tiger Hill excursion is the 'thing to do' in Darjeeling; our rice-loving Bengali friend on the ship had strongly urged that we should make a point of seeing the sunrise from Tiger Hill. It means getting up at five in the morning and making an hour's car drive to the foot of the hill; you then walk up and hope that there will be no clouds hiding Everest from you.

We had several consultations with our fellow countryman garage-proprietor—as he proved to be—but he considered that there was too much cloud to make the trip worthwhile. March was not the month. In November, now, you could see the whole of the Kinchinjunga range. Even last week the peaks had been visible. But now . . . We looked deep down into the valley at the mist which shut off the world far down below and wrapped the peaks high above, and had to agree that a trip to Tiger Hill would be a waste of time, money, and early-rising.

We made repeated journeys up to the Chowrasta and out along the terrace which ran out from it, encircling the hill upon which stood the temple, and from the end of which, normally, the great Himalayan range should be visible. The mist and cloud persisted, and we began to despair. Must we come and go in Darjeeling without having set eyes on what Dr. Bhanja had described for us, in our little book, as that 'panoramic view, as compared to which the best sceneries of the mountains regions of the world sink into insignificance. Neither the pen nor the brush can depict even an iota of the sublime and majestic beauty of this almost ultra-mundance range of perpetual snow.'

We had no idea what mundance might be, ultra or even plain, but we had come a long way, with some hardship, to experience those very sublimities of which Dr. Bhanja wrote so lyrically, and each time we went along the terrace and saw the valley full of mist and the great bank of cloud stretched across those perpetual snows, we would exclaim, midway between despair and resentment, "What, no Himalaya?"

And then one day, suddenly, without warning—for surely there should have been a blast of trumpets, silver ones at that, preceding a miracle—*they were there.*

They were most extraordinarily there, for instead of looking straight across the valley to them as you would to an ordinary range of mountains, you had to throw back your head and look up, and there they were floating in the sky. And you were suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation that you were experiencing the privilege of looking at the roof of the world. You were looking at the highest point on the face of the earth. You were looking at a vastness and solitude and

Detail of the tower of the Kapâleeswarar Temple splendour which has never known Man—and which millions of people never have this tremendous privilege of setting eyes upon.

There was this feeling that now, whatever happened or did not happen, blessed were our eyes for they had seen. There was the necessity to gaze and gaze; the feeling of never being able to look enough. Perhaps never again should we set eyes on this immensity. "Look!" we exclaimed, and "My God!" and then there was completely nothing else to say, and nothing to do but stand and gaze and gaze, and always that sense of whatever happens now we have known this. The sense of awe, the sense of shock from the impact of such absolute beauty suddenly revealed.

As we watched the clouds closed in again. We turned away. The moment of truth was over.

All next day they remained obscured. We did not expect to see them again, any more than we expected to see the tiger again as we had seen him at close range that evening in the fading light. We walked about Darjeeling taking photographs, making notes. We shivered in the cold air, and took it in turns to go into the post-office to inquire for a telegram from Assam which should determine our next move; without that telegram we should not reach the jungles of Assam . . . in such cases one never knows how long to wait. The telegram did come eventually—but by that time we had come and gone in Assam.

We climbed a hill to a church on the top, and it proved to be St. Paul's School church. Primroses and daffodils blooming at the foot of the hill made us suddenly homesick . . . and tiny humming-birds like brilliant flowers probed their long beaks into blossoms whose names we did not know and made us realise that home was a green land very far away—and that between us and it lay Assam, most exhaustingly difficult to get to in a series of journeys somewhere down there in the burning plain.

As we came down from the hill a woman walking with another on the path below us suddenly parted from her companion and came running after us and gave us *Salaam*, and held out a dirty piece of paper to us. On this piece of paper it stated in English that the bearer of it was poor and in need of help, and various people had signed it. We looked from the paper to the woman, inquiringly.

"No father, no mother, very poor," she rattled off. "You give something—ten rupees—five rupees—what you like. . . ."

We seemed to have heard the incantation before and gave her back the paper and turned away—at which she seemed very aggrieved, and repeated her set-piece, "No father, no mother . . . you give something, memsahib, two rupees . . ." But even the cut-rates did not prevail upon us.

The morning we left a row of bearers lined up with camellias, plucked from the tree in the garden, in their hands . . . but we felt we knew that one too—that it was, in fact, almost where we came in. . . .

In the grey dawn of that morning, wakened again by the running howl of the jackal pack, we leapt out of bed to see what might be seen. We could not see the jackals, but we saw something which caused us to get up before six and dress hurriedly and ascend the still sleeping street to the empty Chowrasta and hoping yet not daring to believe that hope could really be fulfilled went for the last time along the terrace . . . and *they were there*! Floating high in the sky, above the massed white clouds, the tremendous yet ethereal peaks of the world's highest mountains, the Kinchinjunga range of the Himalaya. The sunrise was just touching them, those vast white wastes remote from the touch of Man—tremendous, inviolable, absolute truth because absolute beauty. One of us tried to take photographs, the other tried to formulate words; but the photographs were inadequate, and the words did not shape then, nor do they now.

Being English, all we said, as we turned away, shaken again by the shock of revelation, was "We are very lucky!"

Then the sense of degradation as we followed the women coolies down the hill, they bearing our burdens, and the little train, and the zig-zag descent down through the tea-gardens, the huddled ramshackle villages with the ugly corrugated iron roofs, and the hedges of flaming poinsettia, and the bananas growing so close to the line we could have picked them as we passed; down through the bamboo forests and the tall sal trees, down from the snowy coolness to the dusty heat . . . and the wandering starving dogs, and the smells, and all the squalors of the burnt-up plain where India's teeming millions live out their lives. . . .

Siliguria again, and the European-style refreshment-room; a hot rattling train to a place in Pakistan called Parbatipura; an argument at the booking-office because we had no Pakistan money; a young Christian Indian we had talked to on the train to our rescue. Insufferable heat, a raging headache, then a crowded train in which an angry American lady kept protesting that she had a *first*-class ticket, whilst an impassive Hindu mother put her numerous children to bed—as it seemed to us all over the place, and a little servant girl with wild uncombed hair kept herself aloof. The lady's husband kept coming to the coach to bring food, consult with his wife, argue with the ticket inspector about the amount of berth space he was entitled to; the youngest child of the batch screamed and wailed and yelled, and cockroaches as big as small mice wandered over the floor, over the berths, and I wakened from a light confused sleep to find one crawling on my hand . . . after which sleep and I parted company for good, and somehow the hideous night had passed . . . and the child screamed on.

11

GAUHATI OF THE PALMS

To reach Shillong, the capital of Assam, you leave the Calcutta Mail at Amingon and cross the immensely wide river Brahmaputra in a ferry-steamer, and take the bus at Pandu Ghat on the other bank up to Shillong some five thousand feet above the plain.

The train was late, however, and we arrived at Pandu to find that the Shillong bus had gone, and various inquiries revealed the fact that there was no other means of getting there; inquiries also revealed the fact that there was nowhere to stay in Pandu. A railway official helpfully suggested that there was the station waiting-room in which to spend the twenty-four hours before there would be another bus. In the East, admittedly, to camp out on a station for twenty-four hours is nothing very remarkable, but we were unable to overcome the feeling that it should be possible with a little resourcefulness to do better than that. Telling ourselves that God helps those who help themselves we cast about for self-help.

The American lady of the night journey had already gone off with a young man who had travelled in the next coach on the train; they had been met by a young woman whom we later discovered was his wife; they were bound for the American Medical Mission at Gauhati, an ambulance from which awaited them as transport. It was from them we learned that the Shillong bus had gone and that there was nowhere to stay in Pandu. There was a vague suggestion about getting a car from Gauhati—but there appeared to be no means of getting to that place. We strolled over and casually informed the group who, fortunately, still stood by the ambulance, that we appeared to be 'stuck'. They were busy piling what seemed incredible quantities of baggage into the ambulance. We'd take you with us to Gauhati, they said, but as you can see there simply isn't room.

We replied that we did see. But we continued to stand there in the dust and the sun. There was, after all, nowhere else to go except the waiting-room—for twenty-four hours.

"We don't really," I said, like one who merely observes that it's a fine day, "know what to do."

The young man looked at us despairingly. He knew, and we knew he knew, that he could not just drive off and leave two women, English at that, standing in the dust.

"Have you much baggage?" he inquired.

"Only our bedding and rucksacks," we said, trying to make it sound even less than it was.

"Perhaps we can manage," he said. . . .

So there we were once again among the missionaries, the American Baptists this time. The Mission House, and a straggling hospital, part of which had at one time been an Army cook-house, stood with various staff bungalows and a training-school in a large arid compound dotted with palm-trees and leafless trees about to break into crimson flower. There was European plumbing in the bungalow, and mosquito nets round the beds, and the rooms were blessedly dark and cool.

To lie flat on a bed in the dark and cool, with no wheels reverberating under one, and no fretful squall of children, no flies, no cockroaches, no shrill clamour of Indian stations. . . .

We turned resolutely from the sweet thought as from the occasion of sin, and when tea was over—wherever English is spoken there will tea be also—set out through the heat across the great open spaces of the compound for the little town.

We had liked the look of it as we had driven through, and we liked it even more when we walked its streets flanked by tall palm-trees. There was a pleasant absence of beggars, and only a few wandering cows and goats and stray dogs. There was not the oppressive sense of dire poverty which characterises most Indian towns. In the narrow crowded streets of the bazaar there was the usual smell of joss-sticks, and a blare of radio relaying modern Indian dance music—some of it curiously like *rumba* melodies, and, generally, more Spanish than Indian—from the numerous gramophone and radio shops.

We made our way down to the river, with a wide sandy foreshore and wooded hills on the far side, and palm-trees with top-knots of leaves balanced on slender silver-white trunks which leaned against the sunset. There were no Europeans, and very few Indian women. Men and youths squatted under the trees, some being shaved, and white-clad figures swarmed along the pavement above the foreshore; they stared at us, but we assumed our not-seeing faces and concentrated on the tremendous sunset and the leaning palms and the wide beautiful river. It is a sad lost curiously Gothic landscape, with its rocky island, dark woods, and shadowy glimmering water.

As a courtesy to our hosts we attended service in the Baptist chapel, a wide bare hall with a platform at the far end, on which sat one white man in a linen suit and gaudy American tie, and a row of Indians, European-style.

There was a large congregation, all Assamese, of both sexes. The large bare hall gave the impression of a political meeting rather than a religious gathering. The gentleman in the linen suit appeared to be giving some sort of 'pep' talk about confidence. He had confidence in India, he said, and in them, and they must have confidence in him. He declared his readiness to 'go down into the darkness of hell' for them, if need be, into the ditch with them, to get muddy with them if need be. But right now he was going back to America, to his own *vurry* beautiful country, and his *vurry*, *vurry* beautiful daughter who was going to be married and he hoped she would have some *vurry*, *vurry* beautiful children; but he would go on loving them all, he said, and they must love him, must have confidence in him . . . It all flowed like water from a tap. Words, words, words. The young Indians sat and listened intently. Earnest, serious young people converted to the Christian idea. . . . It was impossible not to feel the waste of opportunity. What had all this brisk breezy Samuel Smiles stuff got to do with the Christian gospel of love of God and neighbour?

Then the minister said that before they parted he would like to share with them an important part of Christian ritual, and some of the glaring electric lights were switched off, and young men brought round trays of thimble-sized glasses of watered red wine, and when everyone had one the minister observed in a prosaic tone that Jesus had said we should do this in remembrance of Him, and everyone swallowed the sip of wine. Diced bread was then brought round and the ritual repeated. After which a Western hymn was sung fairly tunelessly by these Eastern people, and the service was over. We returned to the Mission House in the ambulance. An old woman wearing a *sari* and carrying a small child got in with us and was put down at the gate of the compound.

We were told that jackals raced across the compound at night, with their frightful running howl, but if they did we did not hear them, for we slept the great black sleep of what we were beginning to think of as Indian exhaustion.

III

SHILLONG OF THE PINES

THE drive up from Gauhati to Shillong does not afford the tremendous views of the climb from Siliguria to Darjeeling, or from Kathgodam to Naini Tal, but it is nevertheless very beautiful. The ascent is gradual. At first there are the open fields of agricultural lands; there are orange orchards, and houses on stilts. Then the road begins to climb up through dense jungles of bamboo and teak, and there are occasional bamboo hut villages half hidden among tall palms and plaintain trees and the papaya trees with their huge green fruits all huddled at the top. Then the road emerges from the jungles and drops down to rolling downland, treeless and bare, and oddly reminiscent of the Sussex Downs. On the last stage the road zig-zags sharply up through pine woods.

The road is only open at certain hours, and there is an hour's delay at Nongpoh, some thirty miles out of Gauhati, waiting for the gates to open, the up and down streams of traffic lined up each side of the road. Nongpoh appears to exist solely by virtue of this halt; every shack of a roadside bungalow is a café catering for the travellers with tea and synthetic fruit drinks and general light refreshments. There are stalls of fruits and nuts, and the whole atmosphere is road-house and shoddy in the extreme. A beggar either mad or feigning madness jerks and writhes and gesticulates in what would appear to be the last stages of St. Vitus dance, uttering inhuman cries the while. Near the gates a newly painted jeep was offered for sale. Back from the road some bamboo huts seem to crouch under top-heavy papaya trees. On a track running inland from the road it is several times forbidden in large notices to commit any nuisance.

When we wandered away up this track, bored with standing about in the heat and dust, and feeling no need for any of the wayside refreshment, a turbanned policeman, on duty at the point where the track left the road, said something to us. But as we had no idea what he said and he made no attempt to stop us we continued on our way. Perhaps he was merely telling us to commit no nuisance.

What the guide-book calls the most 'picturesque' part of the journey is after Nongpoh. At one point large areas of the jungle were being burnt off with a tremendous roar and crackle to prevent forest fires. In the United Provinces this burning-off takes place in the jungles in April, when wide areas of the elephant-grass are burnt off and 'fire-lines' created for the protection of the carefully conserved forests. The fire-lines are much patronised by tigers, who are very partial to paths.

Shillong, when we finally approached its straggling outskirts, proved to be a conglomeration of ramshackle-looking houses with corrugated iron roofs. In what was the European quarter there are shoddily built bungalows in black and white, and one with a thatched roof, standing among pines. The houses are flimsily built in Japanese style, because the district is subject to earthquakes. The whole place has been entirely rebuilt since 1897, when an earthquake razed every building to the ground. There are some Japanese-style public gardens in a hollow, with dwarf pines and a curved iron bridge over a small artificial lake, like something on a willow-pattern plate.

Shillong is supposed to be a beautiful hill-station. Certainly the surrounding Khasi Hills are beautiful, but the town itself is shoddy in the cantonment and squalid in the bazaars, though, as in Gauhati, there are no beggars and but few wandering animals. The people are Mongolian-looking for the most part, and there is a preponderance of European dress among the males.

The women wear very simple cloaks—lengths of material draped round them and knotted in front—a modified form of *burka* which leaves the face uncovered. A few women wear *saris* just as a few men wear *dhotis*. We saw women working in quarries, carrying baskets of stones on their backs, and women breaking stones in the bed of a river—whilst a group of men and boys lolled on the ground under a bridge nearby playing cards. The women threw the stones as they broke them over their shoulders into long cone-shaped baskets strapped to their backs. Quite small children wear baskets secured to their backs by straps passed round their foreheads; they carry heavy loads of stones and wood, their little backs bent low under the weight. In the streets women carry loads of wood in the cone-shaped baskets on their backs. The male, apparently, does no carrying; the women are the beasts of burden. Yet for all that the Khasis are a matriarchy, with inheritance through the mother, and the children taking the mother's name.

I find I have a depressed note in my journal under the heading 'Shillong'—'Feeling so "dead" here. It's not "India". It's not really anything except a British hill-station. Eleven aspidistras in the dining-room of the hotel, and the most frightful kind of English sepia prints—Scottish terriers with tartan bows round their necks, stags in the Highlands, and so on, and antlers and stags' heads everywhere.'

But there was one thing I did like in Shillong, enormously. It was a notice outside a shabby little restaurant in a street in the bazaar:

VAGITARIEN RESTAURENT

Please See
Persons with
Infections Diseases
Dirty Drunk
Carrying Meat
or Fish
Disallowed in
This Restaurent

Madras; the 'car' used for puja *during Dasara*

And a walk up into the hills and out to a village, where the men smiled and nodded to us in friendly fashion, and the women and children peeped behind the stone walls enclosing their small low houses. Women worked hoeing furrows on incredibly steep hillside slopes, and there was an immense view across the plain six thousand feet below out towards the Himalaya.

The jungles are full of rhinoceros, elephant, tiger, but the letter which would have 'laid them on' for us arrived too late, and we left without setting eyes on them, which was grievous; but lacking that letter which would have opened the jungles to us we were glad to go from what an incredible guide-book called 'the best hill-station', where 'the surrounding scenery drives away the dullness of spirit'. After this rather flat beginning the writer warms to his subject—'The rolling downs on all sides, picturesque waterfalls, rows of fragrant pines, red roads intersecting one another and pleasant grass-rides have made it an enchanted land, an Earthly Paradise, where one may enjoy eternal peace, face to face with the naked, beautiful and all-perfect creation of the MASTER ARTIST, drinking deep of the sweet and healing fountain of Nature and forgetting the woes and worries of this torturing nightmare which men call life. This is the place where human heart feels "the calm that nature breathes among the hills and groves".' The writer also assures the reader that 'If any gentleman likes to keep his children in a healthy place and train them up at the same time in European style, his choice must fall on Shillong.'

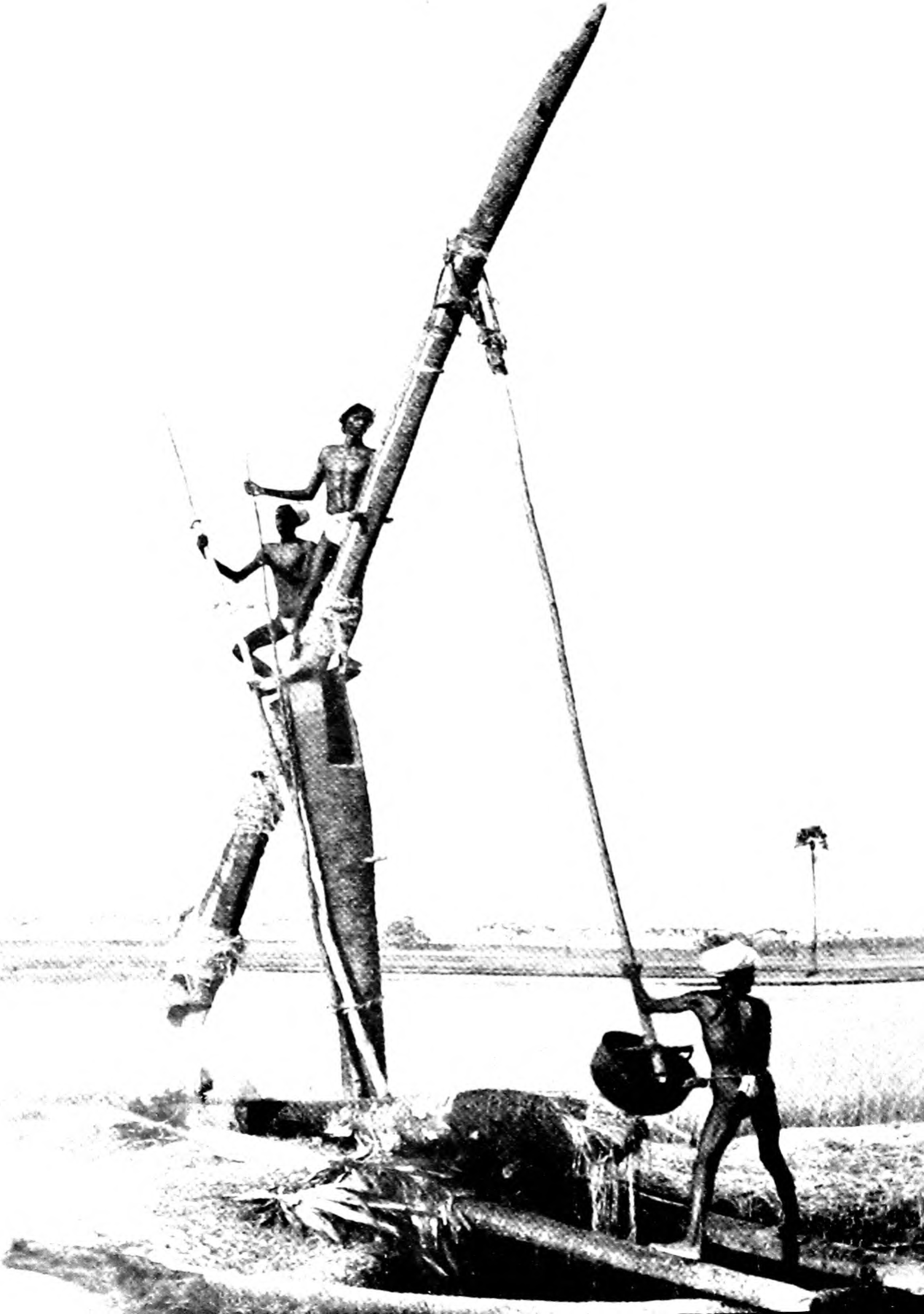
On the journey down from this 'nice little town of modern construction, situated in the bosom of the Khasi Hills . . . the most picturesque Hill Station in India', I developed deafness and an agonising ear-ache. The heat by the time we reached Nongpoh was so intense that it was impossible to lay a hand on the door of the car. For a cup of tea and some biscuits on the verandah of a rest-house we were charged two rupees (three shillings).

Back in Gauhati a sign outside a chemist's shop announced itself as 'Money-Making Pharmacy'.

At the Mission House we were told of freight 'planes to Calcutta which—illegally—took a few passengers for half the cost of the ordinary passenger 'planes. No receipts or tickets were issued, and you just had to go out to the airport and hang around and go aboard any 'plane that was going; whether they would take women passengers no one knew. We decided, anyhow, to see what could be done about it, since the alternative was the exhausting journey by ferry and train, with an extra train thrown in this time, from Gauhati back to Pandu.

In our search for the freight 'plane office we visited three or four airline offices; everyone was convinced we wanted the regular passenger service and seemed never to have heard of the small company we sought. Finally a far-from-European-style gentleman, overhearing our inquiries in an office, took charge and bade us follow him, which we

Pumping a well in the paddy-fields near Madras



And a walk up into the hills and out to a village, where the men smiled and nodded to us in friendly fashion, and the women and children peeped behind the stone walls enclosing their small low houses. Women worked hoeing furrows on incredibly steep hillside slopes, and there was an immense view across the plain six thousand feet below out towards the Himalaya.

The jungles are full of rhinoceros, elephant, tiger, but the letter which would have 'laid them on' for us arrived too late, and we left without setting eyes on them, which was grievous; but lacking that letter which would have opened the jungles to us we were glad to go from what an incredible guide-book called 'the best hill-station', where 'the surrounding scenery drives away the dullness of spirit'. After this rather flat beginning the writer warms to his subject—'The rolling downs on all sides, picturesque waterfalls, rows of fragrant pines, red roads intersecting one another and pleasant grass-rides have made it an enchanted land, an Earthly Paradise, where one may enjoy eternal peace, face to face with the naked, beautiful and all-perfect creation of the MASTER ARTIST, drinking deep of the sweet and healing fountain of Nature and forgetting the woes and worries of this torturing nightmare which men call life. This is the place where human heart feels "the calm that nature breathes among the hills and groves".' The writer also assures the reader that 'If any gentleman likes to keep his children in a healthy place and train them up at the same time in European style, his choice must fall on Shillong.'

On the journey down from this 'nice little town of modern construction, situated in the bosom of the Khasi Hills . . . the most picturesque Hill Station in India', I developed deafness and an agonising ear-ache. The heat by the time we reached Nongpoh was so intense that it was impossible to lay a hand on the door of the car. For a cup of tea and some biscuits on the verandah of a rest-house we were charged two rupees (three shillings).

Back in Gauhati a sign outside a chemist's shop announced itself as 'Money-Making Pharmacy'.

At the Mission House we were told of freight 'planes to Calcutta which—illegally—took a few passengers for half the cost of the ordinary passenger 'planes. No receipts or tickets were issued, and you just had to go out to the airport and hang around and go aboard any 'plane that was going; whether they would take women passengers no one knew. We decided, anyhow, to see what could be done about it, since the alternative was the exhausting journey by ferry and train, with an extra train thrown in this time, from Gauhati back to Pandu.

In our search for the freight 'plane office we visited three or four airline offices; everyone was convinced we wanted the regular passenger service and seemed never to have heard of the small company we sought. Finally a far-from-European-style gentleman, overhearing our inquiries in an office, took charge and bade us follow him, which we

Pumping a well in the paddy-fields near Madras did through a labyrinth of narrow crowded streets. He brought us finally to an open-fronted room where *dhoti*-clad figures squatted on the floor or reclined on a *charpoy*. Our escort indicated that this was the place we wanted, said *Salaam*, and disappeared into the crowds on the street.

Nothing could have looked less like an airline office, freight or passenger, but I inquired of a man leaning against a lintel if we could go by freight 'plane in the morning to Calcutta, and he rolled his head from side to side and said Yes, if you like. I asked him what time the 'plane went, and he rolled his head again and said eight o'clock, nine o'clock. I said, Do we come here? And he wagged his head and replied If you like.

It was a very hot evening and the effort to break through to his dark intelligence intensified the heat. "Do we come here or go to the airport?" I persisted. "You come here," he said. "At what time?" Much rolling of the head then. "Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, when you like." "But what time does the 'plane *go*?" I cried wildly. He looked at me with his dark expressionless eyes, "What is it you want?" he inquired, patiently.

Jean at my side murmured, helpfully, "He doesn't understand."

By then the sweat was streaming down my face like tears.

"We want to go to Calcutta by freight 'plane tomorrow," I began all over again, in English as basic as I could make it. "Is that possible?"

If he rolled his head any more it would fall off, I thought.

"You come tonight and see sahib," he announced.

Now we were getting somewhere, I thought.

"What time?" I inquired.

Unbelievably he replied, "Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, when you like."

I gave it up.

"We're going by ordinary passenger 'plane," I announced, violently, as we became again part of the crowd in the narrow street.

"It costs twice as much."

"At least," I said bitterly, "we'll know what time to be where!"

We trudged back to the Mission House through a heat that seemed to cling like a wet bathing suit. After the coolness of the hill-station it seemed intolerable. And I still could not hear properly.

We turned on the fans and lay on our beds under the mosquito nets. The fans went trundle-trundle-trundle, and chug-chug-chug. The brain-fever bird went screeching hysterically through the hot black darkness—the voice of the ever-present jungle. And then that most horrible of all jungle night-sounds, the blood-curdling howl of the jackals, running, running. . . .

Quite suddenly it came to me that I did not want to go anywhere else in India. I wanted to go *home* . . . but there were more jungles ahead. Somewhere in the very middle of India. And we were committed to them. Home was a green land, and a cool land—pale primroses and dew on the grass—very—far—away. . . .

IV

MISSION HOUSE HOSPITAL

BEFORE leaving for the airport in the morning there was time to inspect the hospital. We were taken round by the young woman doctor, who runs it with the assistance of an Indian doctor. We got the impression of a gallant and very valuable job of work being done under very difficult circumstances. This young woman in her early thirties—little more than a girl, she seemed—is apparently chief physician, surgeon, and general out-patients' doctor. The wards were dark and overcrowded, and everything, dispensary, operating theatre, laboratory, very second-rate and makeshift.

In the children's ward there were some very wretched looking little babies and undersized children. Some of the children are waifs brought to the hospital and left there because no one wants them—illegitimate babies which must be got rid of at all costs short of murder, and babies whose mothers have died—very often in giving birth to them—and which are merely a nuisance to the father, who always intends to marry again. Although sometimes, the young woman added, a father would be in tears over having to bring his child and leave it at the hospital.

"But why pass the responsibility to you in this way?" I demanded. "Couldn't the family take the child?"

To which she replied simply that usually the family did not want it, and when there is no sense of moral responsibility what are you to do? You cannot leave the child lying on the doorstep. . . .

Another problem she was up against in the hospital, she told us, was the Hindu insistence on eating only food prepared by members of their own family—with the result that patients had their families camped out at their bedsides preparing food, and the wards were always cluttered with people—apart from the impossibility of seeing that the patients had only food suited to their condition. Patients would starve rather than eat food prepared by 'untouchables'—whether of their fellow countrymen or foreigners.

She had many cases of venereal disease and kindred infections among the women. The girls, she said, were married in their early teens, usually to men much older than themselves, and the men had 'knocked about a bit before marriage' and were very often not in a fit state to marry—and the poor young brides paid the price. They paid the price, also, of their own utter ignorance of elementary sexual hygiene. They were ignorant, also, concerning contraception, and were pulled down by too many and too frequent pregnancies.

"And do you succeed in letting in a little light?" I asked.

"I think we do, a little, but it's uphill work. Their religion holds them back."

I asked her if they were purely a medical mission, and she replied that they did a little very simple Christian propaganda with patients awaiting attention in the Out-Patients'—one of their workers showed the patients picture-books and told them something of 'the Christian story'.

"And do you think it makes any impression?"

I confess that in my inquiry I was much more concerned with the liberation from the darker superstitions of Hindu orthodoxy, in the interests of letting in a little light on hygiene, than with the propagation of the Christian faith as such.

But she answered that she did not know; that it was impossible to say.

The first patients were beginning to arrive in the cool of the day when we left her, which we did with a heartfelt wish for success in her gallant effort, and a great admiration for the devotion she and her handful of colleagues brought to their service, in the face of all the difficulties, both material and spiritual. India has great need of all such 'drops in the ocean' of social service and enlightenment; her women and children particularly urgently need all that the West can bring in this respect. And the West, which has for so long exploited the East, has a great debt to work off.

V

FLIGHT TO CALCUTTA

THE airport outside Gauhati is an unconvincing-looking affair of hut-like buildings surrounded by tall palm trees. The airfield itself appears to have been cut through a bamboo forest. A few white-clad figures wandered about, and there was not a 'plane in sight. We sat in deck-chairs on a verandah which ran the length of a flimsy-looking bungalow of a waiting-room. There was a prowling stray dog, and a pretty young woman in a white *sari* with a gold border.

We sat and stared at the heat shimmering over the bamboos. It was only about nine o'clock in the morning, but the day was beginning to be very hot. Presently a very small 'plane emerged from somewhere and took off with a splutter of tinny-sounding engine. Someone said something about 'the freight 'plane', and we were quite glad not to be in it.

Soon after, a large 'plane roared over and began its descent. Its arrival did not produce that activity of highly-organised efficiency common to international airports when a great air-liner lands. A few coolies and ground-staff strolled over; a pair of landing-steps were brought. A party of Hindu women and children emerged from the 'plane, and a white man wearing a white linen suit and a topee and carrying a brief-case. He joined us on the verandah, and his accent, and his immediate affability, revealed him as American. From him we learned that the 'plane was a Dakota and had come from Calcutta and would return there. He, it seemed, made the journey several times a week, on business; right now he was going up to his home in Shillong, but he had to wait for his car, which in turn had to wait for the road to open. It struck him as ironic that the flight from Calcutta only took a few hours—less than three—after which it required all day to make the sixty odd miles up to Shillong. "But that's the way it is!"

When we left him to go aboard the 'plane he wished us luck and said he was *vurry* glad to have met us. American cordiality never ceases to astonish me. If they feel that way about strangers whatever do they feel for their very dear friends?

The pretty young woman boarded the 'plane with us, but proved to be the stewardess—or air-hostess, as I believe the correct expression is nowadays. We were the only passengers. We watched the wide River Brahmaputra dwindle until it became, as it seemed, a thin silver stream in the burnt-up brown plain, and the tall palms, singly and in groups, became mere toy trees on a plasticine board.

We flew very high and both developed excruciating ear-ache, in spite of plugging our ears with cotton-wool. It became so cold that we pulled rugs—provided by the company—round our knees and shivered in our thin clothing. Whenever I succeeded in sinking into a semi-coma, concentrating on not being sick and in not moaning aloud with pain, the air-hostess came round and wakened me to offer a bowl of sweetmeats or sweet Indian cakes. I was finally reduced to pretending to be sound asleep, ignoring her small hand on my shoulder and her thin high voice with the accented English. I came to life at one point to observe that my companion was sitting bolt upright looking with apparent interest out of the window, and eating a chicken sandwich with what looked remarkably like relish. . . . With a bitter feeling of betrayal I sank back into my coma; tears of pain and self-pity streamed down my face. I vowed to God that if I came out of this ordeal alive I would never take to the air again. But God must be very tired of hearing such vows.

When we stepped out of the 'plane on the Dum Dum airfield at Calcutta the heat that came up to meet us from the concrete runway was fantastic. It was like stepping from a refrigerator into a furnace. Obviously if the whole of Calcutta was like that one would not be able to live in it. But the whole of Calcutta was like that, and we did live in it. Rickshaw men even ran about in it, pulling chairs on wheels in which whole families squatted placidly. There was an occasional European in a topee being pulled along by his black brother, but such passengers were conspicuous by their rarity.

We went straight to the station—by taxi—as we had very little time. Huge fans whirled at intervals above all the platforms. People squatted and lay about on the platforms, one man lying sleeping in the dust and dirt with his knees drawn up indecently exposed from the rear view, which, as Jean drily observed, is 'one of the dangers of the *dhoti*'. But we had by then seen so many curious sights that we were not to be disconcerted.

A few minutes before the train for Nagpur was due to leave, our Brahmin friend came rushing up with a party of friends and relatives. He had been looking for us in the first-class, where all good Europeans travel—we had written him from Darjeeling that we should be leaving Calcutta that day by that train, and that it would be his last chance to get a glimpse of us. Owing to *Holi* the telegram we had sent him from Benares had not reached him till the following day. Now we had only about two minutes.

"You must come back to Calcutta!" he cried, and "Next time you are in India!"

Yes, we said, yes. Who knew? We had loathed Calcutta more than any place in the sub-continent, possibly more than in any place we had either of us ever been in anywhere, but one has never seen the last of any place or any person, with any certainty.

Part V

CENTRAL PROVINCES

I

NAGPUR OF THE ORANGES

FOR twenty-four hours we shared a compartment to Nagpur with four Hindu women and two children who succeeded in turning the compartment into a pigsty before we had been going ten minutes. The shrill incessant voices of the women were all the more painful as our ears were still aching from the air journey. They shrieked and yelled together in their 'conversation', punctuating the din with piercing cries of 'Ah! Ah!' They squatted on their berths, feet crossed, knees widespread under their *saris*, jewels glistening in their nostrils, and dangling from their ears, bracelets clattering at their wrists and ankles; they chewed *pan* and smoked cigarettes alternately, throwing the unstubbed-out ends on the floor, with the pea-nut shells, pith and peel of oranges, remnants of food, and the water from the overturned water-vessels.

In the toilet the children did not bother about going anywhere near the hole, so that it was impossible to get to the wash-basin, and the smell when the door was open was asphyxiating. The flies buzzed, the fans went chug-chug, and the women shrieked and yelled in their high-pitched voices until one would have thought their throats must have ached and all their saliva be used up. The children had sores round their mouths and on their arms and legs. The little boy wore his genitals carefully arranged outside his little pants, presumably for convenience, and the pants were cut with the back side left to expose the buttocks, a children's-wear style we had several times observed in other places. It would have been simpler, we felt, to have dispensed with the garment entirely. The heat made the darkness seem liquid, as though one could put a hand out into the hot black fluid.

However, as night must fall, so eventually day must break, and 'came the dawn' at about five o'clock, heralded by the still yelling ladies.

The long hot day dragged its hours across the burnt-up brown plains whose monotony was broken by the crimson of the blossoming flame-of-the-forest trees. There would be whole copses of these leafless hot-looking trees. Dust-storms spun and swirled in a wilderness of semi-desert land, and cattle stood huddled in the shadeless aridity.

By way of a respite from our travelling companions we walked along the platform to the dining-car, when we reached a station, for a European breakfast. The menu warned us that it was an 'Austerity Meal', at which 'only one slice of bread and no second helping' must be expected. This austerity breakfast consisted of porridge, haddock, fried eggs and potatoes, bread and butter and marmalade, fruit, tea or coffee.

In the heat of mid-afternoon we reached Nagpur and were met by the young Hindu journalist at whose suggestion we were visiting there. He had with him a friend with a very handsome car, in which we were brought to a palatial villa standing in a garden with a fountain in the middle.

This stately home, with marble floors and white furniture, we had entirely to ourselves, complete with barefooted servants who had a disconcerting habit of appearing silently between the long curtains which divided the rooms. There was a large drawing-room full of white-painted chairs and settees, and tables with white-tiled tops; the walls were crowded with paintings depicting Hindu mythology at its most complicated; there were chandeliers and glass ornaments and bric-a-brac of all kinds. There were also, mercifully in that intense heat, a number of fans, all of which we set in motion at top speed.

Adjoining this room there was a long narrow place more like a corridor than a room. Deposited on the tiled floor in this place our baggage, which always looked rather trampish, now looked positively homeless. There was a table and a chair, and built-in cupboards which proved to be full of the clothes of our absent hostess, and there was a long mirror. This room and the drawing-room opened out on to a very wide balcony-terrace overlooking the garden. Here, islanded in a sea of burning white marble enclosed by a white balustrade, stood a large bridal-looking bed covered with a mosquito net supported from its four posts.

"Everybody now sleeps out," our young friend explained.

There was the usual washing place with brass vessels full of water on the floor, and a board to stand on when pouring water over oneself.

The whole place, with its marble floors and white tiles everywhere was a curious cross between a palace and a public lavatory—European-style. We were a little overawed by it; and also we felt rather unsafe in it, because of its lack of privacy; a white-clad, barefooted, turbanned figure, it seemed, might appear from anywhere at any moment of night or day.

Not that, properly speaking, there was much night. The noise from the streets and the sound of radios from the surrounding houses went on till well after midnight; at five o'clock it was light, in the sudden tropic way, and at five-thirty a syren wailed, and again at six-thirty, to rouse factory workers. As soon as it was light, too, the piercing voices of the women began, like a chorus of shrill birds, and there was the stir of people waking and taking up their beds in the gardens and from the terraces all round.

Soon after nine the temperature was already 103 or 4 in the shade—not that, we could discover, there was any shade. By mid-day it was impossible to walk on the marble floor of the terrace barefoot or rest a hand on the balustrade. We turned on all the fans at top-speed and sat about as nearly naked as we dared; the servants, we decided, probably thought us odd anyway with our bare arms and legs—not that their own women, we had observed, were so carefully concealed, for many wore no blouses under their *saris* and there were plenty of glimpses of naked bosoms when they lifted their arms to balance burdens on their heads.

The house looked across to the famous hill with the Sitabaldi fort, which dominates the town. But the hill is low and insignificant and nothing much. Indeed Nagpur itself, although it is the capital of the Central Provinces, is nothing much. It is straggling and shapeless and centreless. It has the distinction of being dead-centre between Bombay and Calcutta, and of being on the long line between Delhi and Madras. It has some imposing municipal buildings, and in the old part of the town a brass-market, and an extensive orange-market, where great mounds of the fruit glow like golden fires in the long dark tents, and there is a great coming and going of bullock-carts, and of men and women carrying incredibly high piles of baskets on their heads.

A pleasant feature of Nagpur is the fact that there are only bicycle rickshaws; man-drawn ones are forbidden.

Nagpur is famous for its oranges. On railway stations in South India the oranges offered for sale are invariably announced as 'Nagpur oranges'. And most excellent oranges they are, too. They are the loose-skinned kind which in England we call tangerines, though in India they insist that they are oranges, and that tangerines are something quite different.

We were taken to an orange garden on our first evening in Nagpur. The owner of it—who also owned the handsome car—had built a two-storeyed summer-house in the middle of it to celebrate Indian independence. He called it Independence House, and he went out there from the city to sleep sometimes in the hot weather. We looked at the white balconied house and thought that it must be very pleasant to sleep out on a terrace in a garden full of orange trees, and mangoes, and papayas, and banana trees with their great fronds of leaves like strips of light green silk frayed at the edges.

This orange garden had, too, numerous flowering shrubs with strongly scented blossoms. There were low hedges of *Mogra*, a low bush with dark glossy leaves and small waxen white flowers with a strong sweet jasmine scent; these flowers make a pleasant decoration for the hair, or to thread as a *leh*. Another excessively sweet-scented bush was the *Kanher*, which flowers both pink and white. The *Kanher* filled the warm heavy air with a sweetness like tuber-roses. There were tall trees with terra-cotta coloured blossoms called *Palas* trees, and guava trees, and plantains, and palms. The owner of the garden moved in his gleaming white *dhoti* like a large moth among the heavy-fruited or jasmine-blossomed trees. Occasionally he plucked a blossom or a scented leaf and offered them to us in his fine brown hands.

Again and again in India one is caught by the strange grace and beauty of the people of all classes, with their sensitive hands, their almond-shaped gazelle eyes, their delicate features, from the Brahmin in his fine, immaculately white *dhoti* to the coolie in his sweat-soaked blue smock; and no less in the face and carriage of the poorest village woman in her faded cotton *sari* than with the high-caste ladies wrapped in their gold or silver-bordered silks; always this refinement of feature, this dark elusive beauty touched with melancholy, curiously moving, and impinging on the consciousness with a sudden poignancy, like the reedy notes of Indian music and the heavy sweetness of jasmine.

Thus we walked in the orange garden in the hot perfumed evening, caught by this nameless sadness of the East, whilst the brain-fever bird hurled itself across the lambent sky, crying despairingly, Did-you-do-it, did-you-do-it, did-you-did-you-do-it, and the copper-smith bird knocked monotonously, kok-kok-kok, insisting that somewhere out there in the hot liquid dusk were the jungles. There was the heart-stirring sense of their nearness, as though the tiger himself were just beyond the garden walls. This time tomorrow, we reflected, with the familiar sense of chemical change in the blood, the chemistry of mingled fear and excitement, we should be there, in the great forests of Central India.

Now with the first star in the still glowing sky it was already tiger-time, since we could no longer see the lines on our hands. . . .

II

JUNGLES AGAIN

WE were now to be introduced to that ignoble form of *shikar* which can hardly come within the definition of 'sport'—shooting by powerful searchlights from a truck. Owing to the curious Indian habit of not answering questions or offering explanations we had no idea when we accepted the Central Provinces 'jungle week-end' invitation what was involved. We had stressed our aversion to killing, insisting that we wanted only to see something of the animals, and if possible get some pictures.

This time we were driven not to any elephant-station but to a yard where a covered truck waited, and a party of *shikaris* wearing khaki linen trousers and shirts and topees. The party consisted of four 'guns', our journalist friend and ourselves, and the inevitable squad of servants —cook, table-boy, chauffeur, and various camp-followers. Crates of beer and spirits went into the truck, with boxes of food and cooking utensils. The drink did not surprise us; we had already been taken to a Hindu household in Nagpur where we had shared some excellent iced lager with our host and his friends. When we asked him how he managed to get it, since prohibition, he laughed and said that licences to secure alcohol were issued in certain cases, on medical grounds. "My friend, for example"—he indicated a man with terribly scarred arms— "had a fight with a panther and his nerves are shattered as a result, so he is allowed to fortify himself with whatever he wants. Now more and more of us find our nerves shattered——"

The nerve-shattered party smiled their dark enigmatic smiles, white teeth brilliant in brown faces.

This *shikar* party was also, apparently, nerve-shattered, judging by the amount of beer, whisky, and gin loaded on to the truck.

"Of course," said our host, "some people nowadays merely go out into the jungle at week-ends for drinking parties—*shikar* is merely the excuse."

We were not, however, left long in doubt that this party intended to shoot.

We drove some sixty miles out of Nagpur in the heat of afternoon, along roads deep in dust, through a countryside where grass and trees and bushes were burnt brown, though the scorching summer had barely begun. The flame-of-the-forest trees with their hot red flowers were everywhere, sometimes forming high hedges along the roads. Many of the trees had already shed their burnt-up leaves and stood gaunt and bare as though a fire had passed over them. There was a fall of dry brown leaves from trees which only a few weeks ago had been cool and fresh and green in the brief Indian spring; the Indian summer is the time of withered boughs and falling leaves, and is followed by the suffocating humidity of the monsoon rains. Properly speaking, the seasons as we know them do not exist in India.

Occasionally processions of bullock-carts laden with timber emerged out of the white dust, the bullocks swerving nervously away from the motor-van. The long graceful horns of the bullocks were always painted in red or blue, some tipped with gold paint.

The heat was so intense that when we got out of the truck at one point to stretch our legs we found we had left damp marks where we had sat. Our handkerchiefs, with which we continually wiped our faces and necks and hands, had long ago developed into mere sweat-rags.

Presently the truck turned off the road and jolted along a track across an open plain; there was forest immediately ahead, and hills in the near distance. We were, it seemed, making for the hills. It would be cool there, perhaps, we thought; but it proved to be merely a degree or two less hot.

When we left the road the cover was hauled back from the truck and the men stood up on the benches at either side, their heads and shoulders above the iron struts which had supported the hood, and which now provided rests for their guns. We continued to sit in the front of the truck, with the driver.

After a while the track ran up through dried-up teak and *sal* forests to a Dak bungalow—much like the forest rest-houses we had known in the United Provinces jungles, but built of wood instead of brick, and, generally, less impressive, suggestive more of a hut than a bungalow. There was the usual verandah running all round, and a *chaprasi* in attendance. Our servants took our baggage, and the food and drink, into the bungalow, then the *shikaris* and ourselves climbed back into the truck—the European contingent with sinking hearts, for what was to happen was now all too clear. But it was now too late to withdraw: we were committed to the discreditable adventure.

We had not been going long before we met a car coming from the opposite direction. Two orderlies with blue turbans stood up in it; a third figure sat. As we drew level we saw that the seated figure was a white man. The car and the truck halted. One of our party greeted the white sahib by name and asked him if he had 'seen anything'. He replied curtly, "Only some pig and deer," then in the same curt tone demanded where we were staying. When he was told he announced that he had the bungalow himself for the week-end and we had better go another five miles on to the next bungalow; he had friends coming the next day.

Our Indian host replied, civilly, that that was quite all right; we should be staying only the one night, and there was plenty of room; the ladies—they are English, he added—would sleep in the house; they and the servants outside. He, also, had his permit for the bungalow.

Mr. X. was quite unmoved by the presence of his fellow-countrywomen. He gave no indication that he had even heard the remark. He had probably decided that English women who went off for week-ends to Dak bungalows with Indian *shikaris* were no good, anyhow. He looked extremely ill-tempered, and when after a long silence, he spoke again his tone was as unpleasant as his expression.

"All the same, I should push on, if I were you!" he said.

"I am sorry," the Indian replied, gently, "but there is room for us all. We shall not disturb you!" He signalled to the chauffeur to drive on.

"I am sorry our fellow countryman was so unpleasant," I remarked, over my shoulder.

"You noticed it?"

"I could hardly fail to!"

"Now we have our independence, and still an Englishman can be so rude! Can you imagine how it was before?"

I was bound to acknowledge that I could—though I had never doubted how it was. Yet I felt bound to defend the honourable few.

"They aren't all like that," I reminded him. "Even under the régime there were some who were different."[1]

We had not been going long after this unpleasant encounter before there was the knock of a rifle-butt on the floor of the truck, the signal for the driver to stop. After a moment a shot was fired—and a peacock rose up out of a tree and flew clumsily across to another a few yards away, its long tail trailing.

"Not a peacock!" we cried, both shocked and dismayed.

Our journalist friend, who was not himself doing any shooting, smiled deprecatingly.

"These *shikaris*!" he murmured.

"Isn't the peacock sacred to the Hindu?" we demanded, angrily.

Indian-wise he did not answer, and the truck jolted on.

Well, anyhow, thank God they'd missed, we muttered to each other bitterly, but after that it was clear what we could expect—they would shoot anything and everything.

Even so, I don't think we quite expected what actually happened, though, we realised afterwards, with some bitterness, that there was nothing remarkable, unfortunately, about it.

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[1] On my return to England I was astonished on looking up *Jesting Pilate* again for the purpose of comparing notes, to find that it was at a Dak bungalow (in Jodhpur) that Aldous Huxley met 'one of the whitest men unhung'. He describes him as 'ill-bred and totally uncultured; prosperous, having come up in the world, and in consequence bumptious and hectoring with all the vulgar insolence of the low man exalted and anxious to remind other people and himself of his newly acquired importance. Towards his fellow Europeans the man's inferiority expressed itself in boastings, but where the Indians were concerned it found vent, towards the poor, in bullying, towards those who looked rich enough to be able to claim the protection of the law, in insult and rudeness.' He adds that in some thousands of miles of travelling in Upper India 'involving many halts at station restaurants and Dak Bungalows it was our misfortune to meet a good many men of this type.' That was in 1924; but it is evident that the species still exists.

We went on for some time, slowly, along the rough forest road; the swift Indian dusk came down, and with it the headlights of the truck were switched on—very powerful lights which could be swivelled round in all directions. Suddenly there was the fatal knock on the floor of the truck again, and again we stopped. There was a silence; a searching silence. Then we saw what they were looking at—a samba in a hollow a little below the level of the road. It stood looking at us with its great gentle eyes, obviously dazzled by the glare of the headlights. Then a very powerful white light, like a stage spotlight, was switched on from the body of the truck—a blinding white light in which the motionless beast was trapped. A shot knocked the creature over; it moved in the hollow, a hind leg waving; there was a second shot, and all movement ceased. There was the clatter of the *shikaris* scrambling out of the track and running across the road and down into the hollow. There was a great trampling and lugging, and a crackle of dry twigs and leaves. We sat staring miserably through the windscreen into the black darkness beyond the reach of the headlights and wondered why we had come. . . .

The carcase was loaded into the truck and we drove on. Soon we saw camp-fires ahead of us, in a broad clearing at the side of the road. As we came closer the firelight revealed men and boys squatting on the ground, and groups of long-horned bullocks. There was a rap on the floor and the truck halted and we all climbed out. Our journalist friend told us that the people were grass-cutters; they were Gonds. The *shikaris* wanted to find out from them what news there was of tiger and panther in that block.

The *shikaris* made their way into the centre of the camp and some of the Gonds gathered round. We wandered about at the edge of the clearing with the young journalist, who spoke with some of the people in Hindustani.

It was curiously peaceful there in the encampment, the fireglow turning the surrounding trees to a dense blackness—a blackness filled with the commotion of crickets and the jingle of bells on the cattle. The Gonds squatted round their fires of long burning branches in silence, and the arrival of the truck appeared to rouse no more than a mild interest. A few of them were gathered round a sick bullock, which stood swaying, its head drooping.

One of the *shikaris* left the group and joined us.

"We will stay here a little," he said briefly, and we asked no questions, being by then well used to the enigmatic Indian manner.

The four of us crossed to the other side of the road where, on rising ground, there was a hut with a couple of *charpoys* along the verandah, and behind the hut a few Gonds squatting round a fire. The *shikari* spoke to them and then drew forward one of the *charpoys*, upon which we seated ourselves and looked at the multitude of stars and listened to the jungle night. It is an eerie sensation listening to the jungle in the darkness, under the open sky. The nerves become taut; it is as though the very blood in one's veins listens, and the quickened heart pumps fear into the blood-stream.

There was the sudden sharp bark of a samba.

"The tiger is moving around," the *shikari* murmured, and looked across to the dark wooded slopes from which the warning cry had come. It came several times, and then there was the deep silence again, broken only by the tinkle of a bell when a bullock moved in the camp across the road.

The *shikari* began telling us about how they had wounded a tiger in these forests last year, and when they had come to follow it up next day it was not dead as it had been reported to have been, and they were on foot and had had to run for their lives.

"You didn't finish it off?"

"We had no chance."

"Then for all you know it is still around and has probably become a man-eater!"

But he would not agree to that proposition; it had been severely wounded. It would certainly have died. The only regret was that they did not get the trophy.

We were silent, and then after a minute or so the young journalist demanded, addressing himself to me, "What do you feel in the moment an animal is shot?" His voice was eager.

The answer was "Disgusted!" but we were, after all, guests, and our host present.

I said, "There are some questions one cannot answer."

Our host murmured, "There are some questions which should not be asked!"

The journalist began to talk in vague general abstractions about Life. He talked at some length, but I do not think anyone was listening. The samba still barked in the near distance. I think the same thought was in all our minds—we three who were not concerned with life's abstractions, what the young man vaguely defined as its 'beautiful vagueness'—that we might meet the tiger who was moving around. Two of us, at least, did not want to meet him spot-lighted from a truck. . . .

With the sound of the truck starting up we retraced our steps across the rough sloping ground and came down to the road. The back of the truck was down and the carcase of the great beautiful beast on the floor was clearly visible. Blood spilled from the bullet-hole in its flank and ran down the boards. A small half-naked boy was throwing water from a bucket over the clotting blood on the let-down back of the truck.

"*Chalo!*" someone said, impatiently. The back of the truck was fastened up and we all climbed back.

We had already passed the spot at which the samba had been shot when the knock came on the floor of the truck again, and in the headlights, both swivelled over to one side of the road, we saw another samba standing looking out from among the scrub at the edge of the forest, a fine stag, its great antlers branching against a background of dead leaves. A rifle cracked and the light-dazzled creature went down instantly. The *shikaris* waited a moment, but no movement came from the undergrowth; no second shot was necessary. The carcase was loaded on to the truck. This slaughter could go on all night we thought, despairingly.

It was impossible not to wonder what they got out of it—wherein lay the sport, the excitement. Both the hind and the stag had stood motionless and light-blinded at the side of the road, at a few yards' range; it would have been impossible to have missed them. As Paul Morand wrote, contemptuously, of this whole method of *shikar*, why not just run them down with the truck and have done with it? This business of killing for its own sake, when neither risk nor skill is involved, will alwaysbe inexplicable to those who lack this blood-lust.

This time the truck was turned and we drove back to the Gond encampment. The truck stopped and the journalist leaned over to us from the back and explained, "This time our friends make the Gonds a present of some meat."

The back of the truck was let down again and the carcase lugged out, spilling the bright blood into the white dust of the road. One of the *shikaris* spoke to the Gonds near the road and a few of them came forward. They accepted the gift in the unexcited, matter-of-fact way in which they had accepted our invasion of their camp.

To our intense relief we got back to the bungalow without further incident—to find that the charming Mr. X. had locked us out of the common-room and instructed the *chaprasi* not to open it to us. He himself was lying out in the open on a *charpoy*, covered with a rug and presumably asleep.

Our hosts, however, were in high spirits from their kills and accepted the situation good-humouredly. From now until we ourselves retired it was evident that Mr. X. was not going to get much sleep. The cook already had a fire going and preparations for the meal in hand. Tables and benches were lugged forward and lamps lit. Crates were opened up and drinks served with ice from a portable refrigerator. Beyond the reach of our lamps and fires the forests were velvet-black against the blue-black sky; the persistent commotion of crickets seemed only to emphasise the tremendous jungle stillness and silence. The stars were thick and brilliant and somehow close. Round the table the five brown faces were alight with an excited animation. The young journalist was still inclined to philosophise, but the *shikaris* were extraverted and gay; they had tasted blood, and the jungles with all their potentialities of danger and excitement were round them. The panther might at that moment be prowling near the bungalow, the warning cry of the samba come again at any moment as the tiger moved along the *nullahs* and came silent-footed down the fire-line.

We looked round the table at this strange company we kept at the heart of the jungle night. There were three who talked and two who listened; of the listeners one was the man with the panther-clawed arms; he wore a ferocious-looking broad-brimmed hat and his dark face had the brooding look of a man who feels he has a score to settle; the other listener wore a piratical moustache and his face was withdrawn and enigmatic, though sometimes his eyes smiled. The two chief *shikaris* could hardly have conveyed a greater sense of satisfaction with life if they had bagged a tiger.

Because of their stupid ideas of sport we felt we ought to dislike them—and we didn't. They were like big children—wilful but engaging. We were allied with them, too, against our unpleasant fellow-countryman. We disapproved of their blood-lust; it had sickened and disgusted us, but it was no use crying over spilt blood; we were with them and had no means of leaving them; there is no last train or bus back from the jungle; once you are there there is nothing for it but to adapt yourself. We adapted ourselves.

The cook squatting on the ground beside his fire, his brass cooking vessels ranged round him, in due course produced a most excellent meal—a positively Moslem meal, though the party was entirely Hindu, in the way in which fish and meat and chicken were all crowded on to the one plate, and the drink flowed, from the initial gin to the final liqueur, as though prohibition had never been heard of.

"We come every week-end, before the monsoons," they told us, adding, "It is our only relaxation." Some of them we knew were married, but evidently a wife and home-life were not considered a source of relaxation.

It was past midnight when we went to our room and our hosts disposed themselves on *charpoys* along the verandah. There was only one narrow bedstead in the room, and the room was dirty and completely comfortless. We spread one roll of bedding and lay down, fully dressed—as we were supposed to be starting out again at three-thirty there seemed no point in undressing—apart from the fact that there was nowhere to put anything and the floor too dirty to stand on barefoot. Between flies and mosquitoes and airlessness and general discomfort we made no acquaintance with sleep that night. At about three-thirty we heard the truck start up and concluded they had gone without us. They told us later that they had not wished to 'disturb' us. They reported a sight of two tigers, but beyond shooting range.

When they returned at five it was light, and we made a rough toilet and joined them outside the bungalow. Mr. X. still lay humped under his rug. . . .

The cook got the fire going and made tea, but the milk had soured overnight and the most that could said for this jungle *chota hazri* was that it was hot and wet, and to that extent 'heartening' after the sleepless night.

At six o'clock we set off in the truck through jungles which in daylight were revealed in all their dried-up desolation of trees with their withered leaves still clinging or stripped bare as an English winter. It seemed fantastic that only a few weeks ago we had known jungles lush and heavy with their greenness, their depths full of a cool green twilight. Now it was as though a great scorching fire had passed over —as indeed it had, the great fire of the Indian sun.

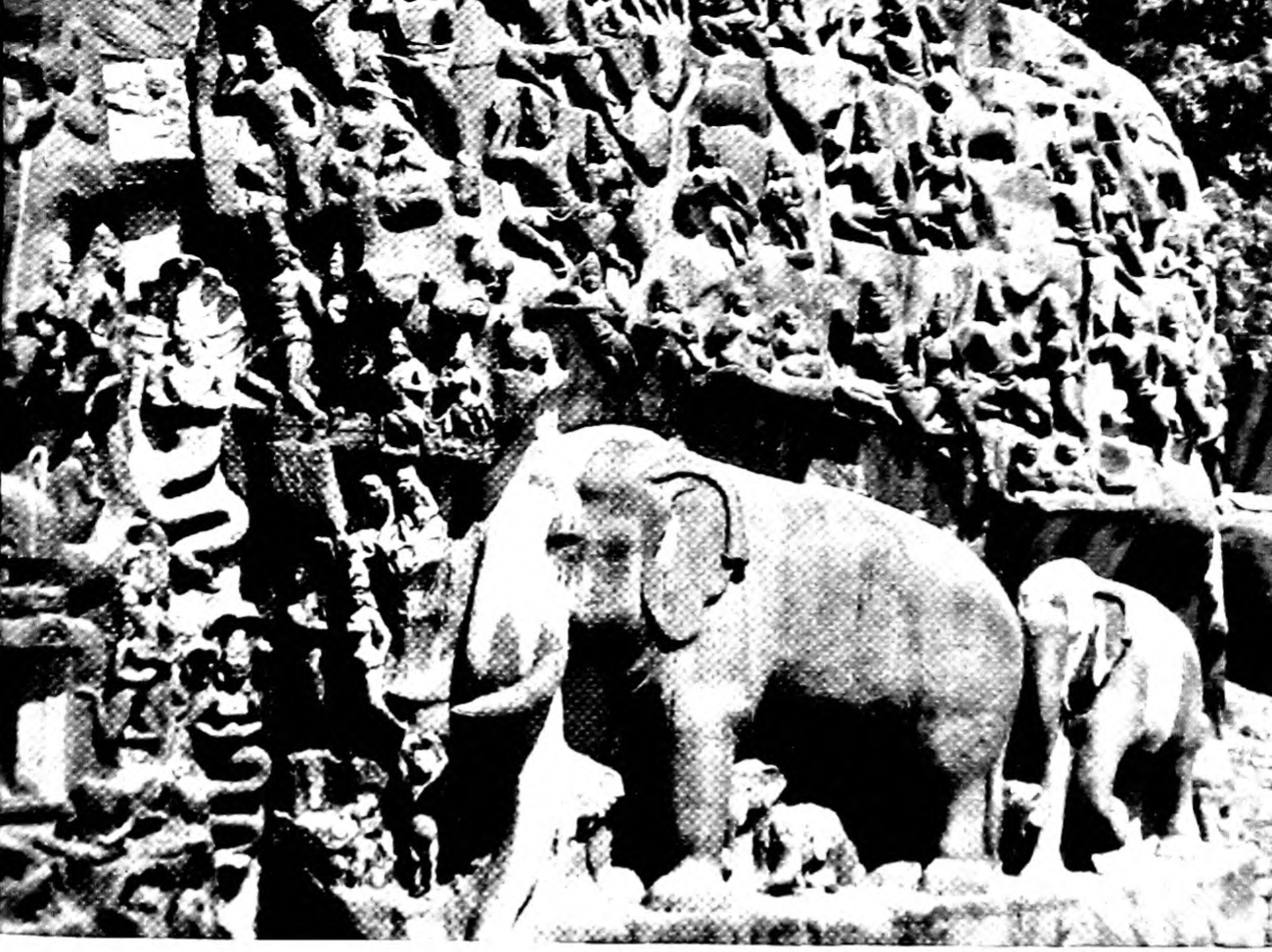
We left the truck at one point and went in single file through thin woods strewn with boulders on hillocks covered with coarse brown grass and shrubby bushes. We followed a narrow track with guns in front of us and behind. We walked softly and our companions looked about them with a great air of alertness. It was into this bouldery place, it seemed, that the tigers they had seen earlier had disappeared. It was a 'likely' place for tiger, too, as the track dipped down to a hollow, at the bottom of which was a pool. They had only last year bagged tiger and panther by sitting over this drinking pool.

We stood for some time among the rocks above the pool, but there was neither sight nor sound of carnivora, nor of any living thing but ourselves; only the little green barbet calling his endless kok-kok-kok, kok-kok-kok, among the leafless trees. After a little scouting about among the boulders and rustling-dry grass, we returned to the truck and drove on to the Gond camp.

This now presented a remarkable sight, for the flesh of the samba had been cut up into slithers and hung on lines in all directions, being smoked from the fires below. The whole camp was a mass of samba meat. Some of it was skewered on to sticks over the fires; some of it hung from lines like a kind of tattered bloody washing. Half-naked figures squatted over the fires turning the meat, or moved about the camp dragging timber, tending cattle, winding up buckets of water from a well in the middle of the camp. The young journalist talked to the Gonds and they told him that they now had enough meat to last them two months . . . so that at least one samba had not died in vain. The stomach and entrails of the creature lay in a great mound, the congealed blood and slime glistening in the bright sunlight.

Our companions were anxious that we should experience riding in a bullock-cart, and this was organised for us, with the collaboration of a Gond driver. A Gond bullock-cart is a primitive affair with wheels of solid wood; the floor of the cart consists of timbers with a layer of dried grass; the sides of the cart rise up like the ribs of a dead ship. You sit on the floor of the cart and look out through the spokes of the sides, and are of course aware of every ridge and rut over which the cart jolts. Even so it was a much less uncomfortable ride than we

The 'Shore Temple' of the 'Seven Pagodas', Mahabalipuram, Madras
'Fall of the Ganges', monolith, Mahabalipuram



had been led to expect . . . unless it was that by then we had been broken in to discomfort.

We jolted along in this way through high brown grass crackling with the heat to a thick bamboo forest. The men walked ahead of us, the grass above their shoulders, their rifles gleaming in the sun, which was already beginning to be very hot.

At the point where enormously high bamboos formed a kind of entrance archway to the forest the men halted and we alighted from the cart.

This, said our *shikaris*, was a great breeding-place for tigers.

We went with them on foot some way into this eerie forest. It was a relief to see something green again after the burnt-up wilderness the jungle had become everywhere else. Here all was lush and dark and green—exuding a green coolness, a cool greenness. There were places in which the bamboo reaching across tracks and clearings formed great Gothic arches. And it was everywhere cathedralesque in its loftiness and dark coolness. Here very well might a tigress lay up in her season to be delivered of her cubs. This was jungle as imagination always pictured it, lush and green and highly stylised, in the Henri Rousseau manner.

But the bamboo is a great deal more than decorative; it is an extremely useful plant—though plant seems an inappropriate word for something which grows as high as a hundred and twenty feet. Not only is the very hard wood of the matured stems useful for fencing and building and the making of goods of all kinds—furniture, buckets, baskets, walking-sticks, and much else—but the young shoots may be eaten like asparagus, and the grains, when the bamboo has flowered and seeded, may be eaten like a cereal, whilst a secretion from the joints of matured stems is used medicinally.

When we left the bamboo forest the sun was high and our shadows had become mere swirls of greyness round our feet. We left the bullock-cart at the camp, gave the Gonds *salaam*, and returned to the truck, driving on through the brown wilderness until the track gave out in a desert of loose white dust at the edge of an embankment above the River Pench cascading among great boulders.

On the opposite bank forests of sun-scorched trees climbed steeply. Palms and other trees which still held their green grew to the edge of the sandy foreshore and offered a blessed shade. There are crocodiles in this river, but none were displaying themselves. We climbed down over the rocks and sat about above shadowed pools of clear green water and waterfalls brilliant white in contrast with the dark yet brilliant sky-reflected blue of the open river.

It would have been pleasant to have remained all day in this cool and lovely spot, we felt, until sundown should bring the animals out to drink—but our Indian friends had other ideas, and after an hour or so we returned to the bungalow to eat the food left from the supper party, and, as one of them put it, 'open up the bar' . . .

'The sepulchres of ancient kings', Mahabalipuram

As we neared the bungalow we saw a large company of men and boys and children sitting on the edge of the verandah.

"Mr. X. is having a beat," our friends explained.

"Do these people get paid for this?" I asked.

"We always pay our beaters. Not everyone does. But the people daren't refuse to beat if they are asked. . . ."

The evil system of *begar* again, the 'dark shadow' which, as Verrier Elwin says,[1] falls across the life of every Gond.

At the far end of the verandah a *punkah-wallah* sat pulling on the cord which worked the *punka* in the room which Mr. X. had allotted himself on arrival, and in which he now lay, it seemed, with a touch of sunstroke . . . but our *shikaris* declared sardonically that really he was sick with fear, because when the jungles had been beaten he would have to go out and face the tiger. . . .

Whatever the cause of Mr. X.'s sickness it cannot have been very pleasant for him lying in the room which opened out of the common-room where we seven now assembled with our iced drinks and the remains of last night's repast. Despite the mid-day heat we managed to be merry, and from time to time after a burst of laughter, one of the *shikaris* would glance at the door of the adjoining room and murmur, with mock solemnity, "But we must remember that Mr. X. is a sick man."

The man with the scarred arms began telling fortunes, reading the future in the lines in our hands. With complete disregard for Western free choice he promised Jean that a rich and suitable husband would shortly be found for her.

But the heat overcame us in the end, and hilarity subsided in drowsiness; our friends simply lay down on the floor, and we retired to our room. Flies, however, made sleep impossible, or even rest, and with the reflection that mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid-day sun we courted sunstroke by going out into it with nothing covering our heads. The heat was quite unbelievable.

We followed a path almost ankle-deep in white dust down through some leafless woods to the collection of huts of a Gond village. Here nothing stirred; cattle stood in such scant shade as an occasional banana or palm tree close to a house offered; here and there on a verandah a man lay stretched out asleep. At the head of the wide street there was a tree which still had some leaves adhering to it; some hewn timber lay on the ground beneath it, and there was a narrow circle of shade. We made a dash for this tree—a dash for shelter from the inescapable, immediately-over-head, sun. When you first experience it the fact that the sun is not a little to the right or the left of you, or behind you or before you, but immediately above you, burning down on to the crown of your head, is a little startling. That and the fact that you walk on your own shadow, that it scuffles round your feet like a garment which has fallen down round your ankles and which you cannot kick away.

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[1] In *Leaves from the Jungle*.

The heat made it impossible to look about in the village as we should have liked, for our progress through it was a series of dashes from one scanty bit of shade to the next; we had the slightly hysterical feeling that if we stood still in that blinding burning glare the sun would strike us down. The sweat ran salt into our mouths. We could not 'believe' such heat.

"It's impossible!" we said.

From within the darkness of their windowless mud houses adults peeped and children stared. Some of the women smiled in a friendly fashion.

We must have presented a curious sight as we made our series of dashes down the village street. We fetched up at last beside a small temple—like a Catholic wayside shrine. There was a little shade here and we rested and looked back at the village crouched under its palms and banana trees in the deep white dust and the ferocious heat.

The Gonds are an aboriginal hill tribe, of the Dravidian race. They have an ancient culture of song and dance, but no written language, therefore no literature. They have a reputation for simplicity of heart, courage, and honesty. From the 12th to the 18th century there were four Gond kingdoms, but the aboriginals fled before the Moguls, and later the Mahrattas, and scattered into the hills. Verrier Elwin says of them that though 'the peacock splendour of their reign' is long forgotten and they now live in great poverty they still bear traces in them of their long history. They certainly have a curious quality of quiet dignity in their bearing, as though unawares the aboriginal blood remembers its royal ancestry, and the women have a delicate-featured beauty.

More than one writer, I have found, declares that the Gonds are spoilt by contact with Western civilisation, and Verrier Elwin declares that he cannot imagine a 'civilised' Gond. He maintains that there are 'many elements in the Gond ethos which should be conserved—their simplicity and freedom, their love of children, the position of their women, their independence of spirit . . . their freedom from many of the usual Oriental inhibitions'. The Gonds, he points out, have had to work out a philosophy of life that can face poverty and disease, frustration and disaster, with unwearied courage. He adds that he has never heard of a Gond suicide. He considers that the primitive has much to give the war-wracked civilised world with its 'passion for possessions and its lack of love'. The mud-hut philosophy, he says, 'bids us not to demand too much from life, not to set too much store on things, not even to expect too much from the immortal gods, but to love most where love will be returned, in the charmed family circle, in the friends who will stand by you till death'.

We wandered some way out of the village, along a track through tall brown grass, and rested under a banyan tree. There were huts on stilts, and a great plain of high crackling grass over which the heat shimmered like water. We found that some children had followed us out of the village; we turned, and afforded them the pleasure of following us back. We sat for a while on the hewn timber under the tree at the head of the street, and a woman in a hut opposite came out and squatted on the verandah and stared fixedly at us. Other women peeped from the doorway. They returned our smiles and we felt a deep regret that we could not talk to them, and that our plan to spend some weeks among these people, observing their life at first hand, had not worked out.

These people in whose houses there is no furniture, no clutter of books and pictures and *things*, whose sole possessions are their few brass vessels, their few cattle, the few yards of cloth in which they wrap their thin graceful bodies, the few ornaments of their women-folk, these people who like to dance and sing, who live each day as it comes, and know nothing of wars, power-politics, and financial and moral corruption—can we really say that we are more 'civilised' than they?

The thought came to me again that night, back in Nagpur, at a party of 'intellectuals' convened to meet the English author and her daughter, when we sat round in a ring in a little garden and talked . . . of the Soviet Union, trends in European and American literature, the possibility of war with Russia, all the usual futile civilised preoccupations. And all over again later at a European-style supper party in the garden of a hotel . . . Soviet Union . . . literature . . . war. . . .

Perhaps Jean did the most intelligent thing of anyone present; for there was a point at which she went sound asleep. Like the dormouse at the Mad Hatter's Tea-Party. Or a Gond taken out to dine.

Part VI

SOUTH INDIA

I

MADRAS

IT becomes a little monotonous to record, as my diary does, 'perfectly horrible journey', but perhaps that journey from Nagpur to Madras, in the wooden compartment with six women and seven children, for twenty-four hours, was the worst of the series of unpleasant journeys. We got into an already crowded and filthy compartment, with nowhere to sit except on our rucksacks. The children spilled water all over the floor to mingle with the mess of orange-peel, scraps of food, nut-shells, paper, cigarette-ends. Nothing ever goes out of an Indian railway carriage window—all is automatically thrown on the floor.

We had been seen off in good style by one of our *shikar* friends—who presented us with a huge basket of Nagpur oranges—the European-style journalist who had organised our stay in Nagpur, and a very charming Hindu-style journalist in glimmering white *dhoti*. They had all tried very hard to find us a compartment in which there was at least somewhere to sit, but the train had come in full and more passengers crowded in at Nagpur than got out. We had come from a large tea-party at the radio station, where at eight that morning I had done the talk fixed up at the supper-party the night before. The Director must have worked very fast to assemble so many people in so short a time . . . so once again we sat round in a ring of 'intellectuals' and said yes it was our first visit to India, no, we had not met Pandit Nehru; and Jean said for the hundredth time that no, she was not going to write, and I for the hundredth time that Stalinism was not Communism, that I disliked modern poetry, that I was not proposing to write a 'verdict' on India. . . . Sometimes in a lull we would hear each other saying across a room, across a garden, across a table—'We were some weeks in the U.P. jungles', 'We were up on the North-West Frontier'. . . . We were beginning to be so tired of our story; of meeting 'intellectuals'—and journalists. So weary of twenty-four hour train journeys in hot, dirty, overcrowded cattle-trucks of coaches. Tired of heat and flies and dust and outsize cockroaches. And ear-splitting voices like a cawing of rooks, with constant interpolations of *Ah! Ah!* The sight of people delousing themselves and each other; and beggars, and mutilations, and starving dogs . . . in short the whole Indian kaleidoscope.

People said, 'You will like South India much better. The people are more educated there. It is cleaner. Madras is beautiful. And Mysore is the Kashmir of the South.' We had not intended to 'take in' South India; that, we had felt, was a quite separate proposition—which in fact it is. But people insisted, 'Madras is only twenty-four hours from

Nagpur; you cannot be so near and not visit it; you cannot leave India without seeing something of the South.'

Not since I made the 'Golden' journey to Samarkand have I been as dirty as on that twenty-four-hour journey from Nagpur to Madras. And it only adds to your sense of degradation, when you are as dirty as that, to be met by a charming Hindu lady in an exquisite silk *sari*, and her husband in immaculate white.

We were swept away by car to their white villa set among palms and banana trees and mangoes and casuarina trees a little outside the town. In the bathless bathroom we poured cold water over ourselves and scrubbed each other's backs, and marvelled that a train journey could so make one's entire body filthy.

The meal to which we were bidden when we were clean was announced as 'tea' but consisted of coffee. In South India 'tea' is always coffee, for this is the coffee country. And the coffee is served luke-warm. Once when it was inadvertently hot our hostess apologised—"I'm afraid the coffee is rather hot!"

In this Hindu house there was a picture of Mr. Churchill in the hall, and a picture of Queen Elizabeth in the upstairs lounge. When, astonished, I asked *why*, our host merely smiled and made no answer —Indian-wise.

It was immediately clear that in this house as elsewhere we were to be highly organised, and after 'tea' we were taken for a drive in the cooling evening air. After Nagpur's suffocating heat we drank in the wind from the sea gratefully. Just to see the sea again somehow made it easier to breathe. Both in Nagpur and the jungles there was the feeling of being hemmed in by the heat, first with buildings, then with trees; as though the tropic world was a vast room with all windows closed; the sea was a window opened, and the spirit as well as the lungs expanded, gratefully.

The drive confirmed our first impression of Madras as a beautiful city. The main streets are wide and clean, and flanked by florid but nevertheless impressive municipal buildings—colleges, museums, hospitals, government buildings. There are tall palm-trees everywhere, and the long sea-front, with its flower-filled gardens and white promenade and brilliantly blue sea, empty of people because it is full of sharks—about which there are warning notices—is flamboyantly beautiful like the terrace of Monte Carlo. On the foreshore there are rows of straw huts where the fishermen keep their nets and tackle. The fishermen go out on rafts, rather like surf-bathing boards, and accidents, as a result of slipping into the shark-infested sea, are common. Along the wide river there are creeks where at sundown the palms seem to lean against a crimson backcloth.

Through the open door of the Catholic Cathedral an altar could be seen whitely beautiful and ablaze with candles. In the gardens everywhere the gold-mohair trees covered all the ground beneath with cloth of gold. It seemed so long ago, now, since we saw our first gold-mohair tree reaching its great branches with its mimosa-like leaves across the white façade of the Churgallia forest-officers' rest-house, and had been told of the golden splendour to come. The flame-of-the-forest, too, had followed us from the jungles, but the trees of mauve blossom were new to us with Madras. And always palms, in the streets, in public gardens, in the gardens of colleges and museums and government buildings, everywhere.

We drove to the gardens of the Theosophical Society where is a banyan tree over five hundred years old and reputed to be one of the three largest in existence. The aerial roots which have descended from the parent tree have rooted and formed a small forest of trees. The expanse from north to south is two hundred feet; from east to west one hundred and sixty feet. Under this tree the Buddha is supposed to have preached, and there is a notice which concludes a number of botanical and historical particulars concerning the tree with the injunction to 'approach it as you would a shrine'. The writer of these notes refers to its aerial roots which have become trees as 'its heaven-rooted columns'.

We returned to this tree the following day to try and get some photographs of it, but a banyan is almost impossible to photograph satisfactorily; in a photograph it always looks like a small wood, and the fact that all these 'trees' have sprung from the aerial roots thrown down by the parent tree is not apparent. A banyan tree is very much one of those phenomena of nature which have to be seen to be believed.

A lesser banyan in these gardens has its aerial roots when first thrown down encased in bamboo for protection until they reach the ground and become rooted there and are sufficiently robust not to be eaten by goats or cattle.

The banyan, like a pipal tree, is sacred to Vishnu. The two are doubly sacred when found near each other. If there is also a neem tree in the vicinity a holy trinity is symbolically established. The banyan is also symbolic of Hindu family life, in which the duties and ties of blood are as strong and inescapable as among the Jews.

In these gardens there is the Adyar Library, founded by Colonel Olcott, the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society. Shoes are removed before entering as the place is regarded as a Shrine, since it houses sacred texts. In the entrance hall—officially the 'Main Room'—there are paintings and busts of Colonel Olcott, Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky, Bishop Charles Leadbeater—who with Annie Besant built up the twelve-year-old Krishnamurti as the New Messiah and toured him all over the world, only to be faced twenty years later by his public recantation, as courageous as it was dramatic.

This Main Room is indeed what it claims to be—a Temple of Religions, for here are represented all the chief religions of the world, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, the Bahai Faith, and much else. A show-case designed to illustrate the Society's belief in 'the unity of faiths' contains a 600-year-old Koran, a German Bible, a Sikh Grantha, Hindu manuscripts in various Indian languages, and other sacred works. In another case there is an Arabic book of prayers in manuscript, some Zoroastrian manuscripts, and a Hebrew sheepskin parchment of the Book of Esther. High up round the walls there are representations of Christ, Gautama, Gandhi, Luther, and other leaders of religious thought—some of them a little odd in the same context as Christ and Buddha.

Never having shared the general adulation of Annie Besant, despite her services to Indian nationalism, I found myself unable to rouse any feeling for this theosophical atmosphere except a vague distaste—irrational and indefinable—and was glad to be conducted to the adjoining room, known as the Central Shrine. Here from floor to ceiling are pigeon-holed thousands of palm-leaf manuscripts of incredible antiquity. There are no less than ten thousand of these brittle bundles and some are eight hundred years old.

We were getting on very happily with an interested inspection of these ancient manuscripts, under the guidance of our Hindu host and the pleasant young Indian in charge of the department, who showed us things with loving conscientiousness, when suddenly an American voice twanged upon the air, and a middle-aged white woman wearing a *sari* and on her forehead the Hindu caste-mark (as it is commonly but erroneously called) bore down upon us and took over and rattled off an interminable set-piece in the worst possible professional-guide manner. She never drew breath, she never let up, rattle-rattle-rattle, wah-wah-wah, blah-blah-blah. There seemed no reason why it should ever cease, as she turned from door-carving to silk painting, picking out detail after detail; it was like a cataract suddenly let loose, a cataract of words, all poured out in that terrible twanging monotone, as though it had all been recited a thousand times before—as it probably had.

As it was impossible to slip in a remark or even a word that might have stemmed the spate we did the only possible thing—turned our backs on her and walked away.

Before we left the 'Shrine' we were required to sign a Visitors' Book—and 'give something'.

In the entrance hall, as we were leaving, a Hindu showed us a scarlet flower, one of several laid before a Hindu shrine, which was an interesting example of Hindu sexual symbolism; it opened like a snap-dragon, and when opened represented the hooded snake; when closed the *lingam*, the Hindu phallic symbol.[1]

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[1] Malcolm Lyall Darling says in *At Freedom's Door*, 'I have been told, more than once by devout Hindus that to the peasant the Lingam, which one sees everywhere in Shiva's shrines and under village trees, is nothing but a symbol of Shiva's might, and the young Brahmin said the same this evening when we visited a village and saw one with its Parvati counterpart under a tree. But when we asked a peasant what it meant to him, his very direct reply showed that it meant exactly what it displayed.'

Architecturally the most beautiful thing in Madras is the great Kapâleeswarer temple in the centre of the city, reputed to be the biggest Hindu temple in use. It rises from the surrounding squalor of mean streets in triumphant assertion of the importance of the temple over all the dwellings of man. We had been told that the temples of South India were much finer than those of the North, but we had not been prepared for anything so miraculously beautiful, as it seemed to us, as that great blue-enamelled pyramid embellished with coloured carvings of hundreds of figures from Hindu mythology. The whole face of the temple on all sides is covered with these coloured enamelled reliefs like an enormous Della Robbia piece. The reliefs are arranged in tiers depicting the seven stages of the ascent to heaven. The Seventh Heaven is a glittering hooded-snake canopy of gold.

We saw the temple first by lamplight, and it seemed to taper to the stars. We returned the following day in sunshine to study it more closely and get some photographs. The banyan tree was easier to describe in words than to photograph; the temple was highly photographic, though difficult to photograph because of the necessity to take it at an angle, but words cannot adequately convey the wild barbaric beauty, and the photographs, I think, do.

Near the temple is an enormous chariot used for *puja* on special feast-days. The wheels are of wood and are immense; the 'car', as it is called, is drawn by people. The priests stand up under the canopy and offerings of flowers and fruit are handed up by the crowds to be blessed.

There is another temple in Madras, with a tank whose green scum is covered with huge lotus leaves. It is glittering and beautiful, but does not provoke the shock of wonder of the Kapâleeswarer temple.

For the rest, there stands out in Madras a dinner-party given in a hotel garden, at which the broad green silk of plantain leaves served as plates; the food was dotted about on the leaves in little heaps and we ate with our fingers. Apart from ourselves and our hostess there was only one other woman present, a young Hindu girl journalist—the company was mainly if not entirely composed of journalists—who wanted specially to be introduced to the guest-of-honour. The introduction was effected, and the English author answered the usual questions and did not dream she was having anything but a dinner-party social chat. But a week or so later there appeared an article in a weekly paper under the young girl's name and it was all about this 'brilliant' English author as a 'woman without heart', with the remarkable statement, that she was 'not feelingless but without feeling', and 'capable of an infinite and passionate giving but without tenderness'.

If anything, of course, can harden an English author's heart, and leave it singularly without tenderness, it is Indian journalists. . . .

I was asked in Madras to address a gathering of them. Again it was the usual story of feeling under obligation to a host. I replied that I disliked speechifying, but I would meet the journalists and they could ask me anything they liked. Later I realised that this was a rash thing to have said—that it would mean answering the same set of questions some hundred times or more; I therefore said that on second thoughts I would give an address, answering in it all the questions I had been asked all over India concerning my views on contemporary literature and politics. It was still to be a purely private social affair, but I would do it in this way. I talked for about an hour—on a sweltering hot night in a noisy room above main-street traffic, spoke freely as in a private room, and answered questions at the end no less freely . . . and next day the biggest paper in the city had a full report of the whole thing. It was, for once, accurately reported, but one does not want publication of many of the things one says in careless good faith at a presumably private meeting.

The other thing we did not like in Madras was the use of men instead of horses. There is no horse traffic; what is not drawn by bullocks is drawn by men, from rickshaws to heavily loaded carts. The Indian reply to my comment on this was 'labour is cheap!'

Every afternoon there sprang up in Madras, as in Benares and Nagpur and Lucknow, a hot high wind with dust-storms—the *loe*. This name is apparently a corruption of a Hindi word, *lun*. It is said that in May and June it can cause heat-stroke, a protection against which is the drinking of water to which salt has been added, and the drinking, also, of mango juice mixed with sugar and water.

When this wind sprang up the coconut palms whose tops reached up to the wide, white-parapeted verandah on to which our room opened, would rustle like dry grass, and the broad ragged green silk of the banana trees would hang with a limp exhausted look. All the afternoon there would come up from the shade of the garden, under the palms and the dark guava trees, and the tamarisk-featheriness of the casuarina trees, the sound of water, and the creak of the Persian wheel pumping up the water and sending it down wooden shutes to irrigate the land. Between the green and the shade there would come white glimpses of the bullocks moving heavily round in their endless circle.

In the cool of evening we would ascend an iron ladder from this verandah and come out on to the flat roof of the house, and all round would be a lush green sea of tropical trees flowing away to the sunset-flushed sky—mangoes and plantains and palms—always the palms, squat and thick, tall and slender, but beautiful and graceful always—and the sudden brilliance of the flame-of-the-forest—all India in that hot red blossom, all the heat and dust, all the wild sad beauty and the unfathomable strangeness. The dense trees made a green jungle all round the house, a cool oasis in the burnt-up brown wildness of the plain; one would look across that enclosing green to the tremendous Indian sunset with love, and a kind of pain—'In truth I know not why I am so sad.' In all the exasperations and wearinesses and exhaustions associated with this Indian journey, there was more and more this sad love, as for something suffering but beyond one's help, something beautiful with a mysterious beauty beyond one's understanding—like temple bells muted; temple bells under the sea, in the lost city of Atlantis. . . . The image is not so extravagant, for we came next day to Mahabalipuram of the Seven Pagodas.

II

THE SEVEN PAGODAS

WE left in the cool of early morning for the thirty-five mile drive to Mahabalipuram. We went escorted by a very beautiful and charming young Hindu, whose name, incredibly, was Shivaramakrishna, and a young Welshman, both journalists on the newspaper staff of our editor host. The expedition had been arranged at the dinner the previous night.

We drove through a pleasant landscape of paddy-fields, brilliantly green in the general aridity, brown plains broken with palms, and low hills in the near distance. We passed through villages where flimsy looking straw huts crouched under their palms and plantains, and where slender beautiful women and girls in red or blue or yellow *saris* looked up, as we passed, from the business of drawing water at the wells. We never ceased to be amazed at the grace with which they balanced their brass water-vessels on their heads, at their superb carriage, and at their shy, gazelle-like beauty. The beauty of the people, everywhere, was a continually renewed delight. Every woman and girl —even the very little girls—in South India twists white jasmine into her hair, whether she wears her plait knotted on the nape of her neck, or down her back, where it falls, very often, to her knees.

On this drive we saw for the first time a primitive man-power method of pumping water we had not come across anywhere else, and which in this part of the country seems to supersede, to a large extent, the Persian wheel. The pump consists of a cross-bar secured to an upright post; two men walk up and down this bar, producing a sea-saw movement which lifts the bucket from the well; a third man empties the water down the paddy-field irrigation channel.

The two thin figures of the men, naked but for a twist of loin-cloth and their turbans, balanced on the cross-bar, their gleaming brown bodies silhoutted against the deep blue of the sky, made a fascinating picture—our only regret being that the camera could not reproduce the strong hot colours. We took a number of photographs—after which the men asked for '*baksheesh*'. They seemed well enough pleased with a rupee, and the Indian boy said, "Now in their village tonight they will be able to get drunk!"

As we approached Mahabalipuram our companions pointed out a temple perched at the top of a high hill; to this temple, they said, every day at mid-day, without fail, the kites come to be fed. There is a feeling of sanctity already at the approach to the Seven Pagodas, with wayside shrines, and signs pointing to the way to the holy hill, all rather like the approach to a Catholic holy place.

Mahabalipuram (or Mamallapuram, or Mahavellipur, or Pallavarum[1]) is best described as a village and an amazing collection of temples, some of them in caves, sculptures, monoliths, bas-reliefs, many of which date back to the 5th century A.D., which in India is not so very old, perhaps, but old enough to make the place of enormous interest to archaeologists. From the archaeolgical point of view the place is, in fact, considered to be one of the most important in South India. It lies in a great plain, semi-desert with scattered palms, at the mouth of the Palar river—from which one of the names in the vernacular is derived. According to one authority,[2] in the 8th century A.D., Mahabalipuram was 'probably a flourishing port, teeming with population, from where Indian artists and architects embarked for distant Java and Bali and carried to these islands the ideals and forms of Indian art'. Apart from the few huts of the village the place is now deserted.

When we arrived at the village the moment we got out of the car we were set upon by guides. We succeeded in shaking off all but one, who was so persistant, paddling along in the dust behind us and 'explaining' things to us with about a dozen words of English, that finally it seemed easier to accept him. His joy when we did so was boundless; his whole being radiated it; he could not stop smiling. He inaugurated his regime by presenting us all with flowers, which he gathered from among the hot rocks and boulders, and then strode joyously and proudly ahead of us—our official guide! He was of not the slightest use, though he showed us a kind of 'certificate', a small and grubby scrap of paper, typewritten and signed, which proclaimed him as an official and honest guide whom the writer recommended. Even with adequate English he would have been superfluous, as our companions had been to the place before and knew it well enough for general purposes.

The place gets its English name from the belief that the two temples, of Vishnu and Shiva, the latter known as The Shore Temple, at the edge of the sea are the last of a line of seven, the other five being buried under the sea.

Southey's poem, *The Curse of Kehama*, describes this sad, lost, enchanted place:

> '. . . the sepulchres
> Of the Ancient Kings, which Baly in his power
> Made in primeval times; and built above them
> A City like the Cities of the Gods,
> Being a God himself. For many an age
> Hath Ocean warr'd against his Palaces,
> Till, overwhelm'd, they lie beneath the waves,
> Not overthrown, so well the aweful chief
> Had laid their deep foundations.

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[1] According to *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. VI, 'The dispute as to its name has been freely discussed in Major Carr's work on the 'Seven Pagodas' and Mr. Crole's Manual of the District. It is a moot point, whether to the Malla family of the Chalukyas, or to Bali of legendry greatness, belongs the honour of naming these wonderful temples.' Mahabalipur is 'The City of the Great Bali.'

[2] P. Thomas, in *Hindu Religion, Customs, Manners*.

Their golden summits in the noon-day light
Shone o'er the dark green deep that roll'd between,
For domes, and pinnacles, and spires were seen
Peering above the sea, . . . a mournful sight!

And on the sandy shore, beside the verge
Of ocean, here and there, a rock-hewn fane
Resisted in its strength the surf and surge
That on their deep foundations beat in vain.

With all due respects to poetic imagery, however, no domes and pinnacles and spires are to be seen thrusting up from the brilliantly blue —not dark green—sea (Southey was never in India), and archaeologists are of the opinion that the troubled surface of the sea a mile or so out is not waves breaking over the temples under the sea but over a reef of rocks. . . .

Be that as it may, the place remains like something in a wild strange dream. The temples, caves, and carvings are at a little distance from the village, and form a kind of deserted city of their own, with roads ankle-deep in untrodden dust. Temples, shrines, and sculptures are all hewn out of the solid granite—how it could have been done with the primitive implements available at the time seems little short of miraculous.

The external carvings, sculptures, and bas-reliefs, of sacred animals and mythological figures on the monolithic temples embrace the whole Hindu Pantheon. In the cave-temples the rock-faces depict scenes of battle and of peace, and representations of the gods. Some of the *raths* or shrines are considered to be copies of Buddhist temples. In front of a cave-temple there are sculptures of figures thought to be Buddha and his five disciples—the heads of three of them have been broken off—and close to them sculptures of elephants, crouching tigers and cheetahs, deer, lions, birds. There is a massive rock-face carving of a giant hermaphrodite figure, and at one point a row of hooded snakes rear up from the dust. There is the inevitable massive sacred bull, and an enormous bas-relief over ninety feet long and over forty feet high called 'Arjun's Penance' and considered to be the most remarkable thing of its kind in India.

But the whole place is so remarkable that it is difficult to describe it except in superlatives. One is continually startled, astonished, and filled with wonder. Xanadu itself could hardly have been a more savage and enchanted place. A poet of Coleridge's calibre might be able to convey its quality of strangeness in words . . . but it seems that a contemporary English poet went there and wrote a poem about it, "But I read it several times," said the Indian boy, sadly, "and I did not understand one word of it!"

With the burning heat of the day full upon us after our wanderings and explorations we went down to the temple by the sea and sat in

Coconut-seller, Mahabalipuram
Children offering shells, Mahabalipuram

the cool darkness of the entrance. We longed to stay there till sundown looking at the brilliant sea framed in the great rock-hewn doorway. The surf came rolling in in long white breakers along a natural plage of silver sand flanked by palms and casuarina trees.

As in Madras, in that tremendous heat it seemed a great waste of all that bright beautiful sea not to be able to go in it. But our host had made us promise that we would not; it was full of sharks, he said; when we suggested we could keep near the shore he said that he could not take the responsibility. Our feet were so hot and burning from the dust and sand, however, after all our wandering about in the heat, that we took off our sandals and paddled at the sea's edge—whilst a group of villagers who had assembled gazed at us in consternation. The sharks, it seem, come in close to shore. . . .

We bought large green coconuts and drank the milk—an operation much more difficult than it sounds, and very uncomfortable. At the time we were amused when one of the journalists took a comic picture of me drinking from the coconut . . . it almost goes without saying that that picture appeared on the cover of a weekly magazine in due course, without the courtesy of request for permission.

Some charming, gazelle-like children came to look at us; they formed themselves into unconsciously beautiful groups, but at every attempt to photograph them they became self-conscious, broke up, scattered, hid their faces. Patience, however, was eventually rewarded and they were caught unawares. They had a young wild beauty, with their tangled hair, flashing eyes and teeth, and thin half-naked brown bodies.

It was cool and restful there in the portals of the temple, watching the long curling line of the breakers, and speculating on the legendary temples buried under that blue water, and watching the children watching us; we had no desire to do anything else, but on that occasion, as by the jungle river Pench, our host had arranged something else for the afternoon, and in the heat of noon we left that strange deserted place full of that peculiarly Indian sadness of a lost ancient culture.

Back in the city an English journalist to whom we remarked that we liked Madras replied, "Yes, it's not bad. Rather like Manchester, really!"

We felt a curious nostalgia when we came to leave this city of tall palms and blue sea and cooling breezes. Sadness stirred in us when we looked for the last time at the green waves of trees laving the parapet of our verandah, and saw the palms leaning against the sunset. We should not, we thought, like any other place in India so much.

A number of people in addition to our host and hostess assembled at the station to see us off to Mysore, and at the last minute we allowed ourselves to be persuaded to break the journey at Bangalore.

The Palace of the Maharajah, Mysore

III

BANGALORE

UNDER the British Raj Bangalore, the headquarters of the government of the State of Mysore, possessed the largest cantonment in South India. Three thousand feet above sea-level it was considered healthy for British troops—and British pensioners. The troops have gone, but the pensioners remain.

From the military point of view Bangalore is one of the historical relics of the South. It is also a museum of British relics of imperialism. Probably nowhere else in the world is there such a collection of the living-dead eking out their futile existences on a few unearned hundreds a year in frowsy hotels plastered with photographs of royalty and reeking of English roast-beef. It is to be doubted if any British spa can offer a collection quite so macabre. Both male and female they are—the French have a word for it—*incroyable*.

I can only think that the Indian business-man who so strongly urged us not to miss Bangalore believed, in his untravelled innocence, that all English people like all other English people, regardless. Indeed it could be that to his indifferent Indian eye we looked neither better nor worse than our fellow countrymen domiciled there.

There is no reason why anyone, in full possession of his faculties, and with no material reason for going there, should spend time—the precious stuff that life is made of—in Bangalore.

Bangalore, says the guide-book, is 'beautifully planned and is rich in parks and open spaces'. That is true; there are a number of parks.

I asked an Englishman in the cantonment what the old city of Bangalore was like, and he made the astonishing reply, "*One doesn't go there!*"

He had lived for some thirty years in Bangalore and not set foot in the only 'real' part of the place. But there must be many of the one-time white sahibs—and memsahibs—who lived thirty and more years in India without ever leaving their cool clean comfortable English-suburb cantonments. And what do they know of India who only the cantonments know?

"What, then, do you consider there is to see in Bangalore?" I then asked this aged English gentleman.

"There are some very fine flowering trees," he said.

"So there were in Madras," I retorted, "and so there probably will be in Mysore!"

We were able to spread our bedding on the journey to Bangalore, and we had no women and children in our compartment, for Hindu ladies seldom travel 'mixed'. Instead we had various Hindu-style gentlemen, one of whom made sleep impossible by bobbing up and down all night, switching on the lights, and juggling with the fans—at one point Jean was almost blown out of her top berth by a fan directed full blast on to her.

We arrived at seven in the morning and were met by a Hindu newspaper correspondent wearing a snowy white *dhoti* and a curiously dark expression. We got the impression that it was an infernal nuisance to him to have to meet us. And quite clearly he had no idea what to do with us—with which we can sympathise, for when you have driven the visitors round the Botanical Gardens and one or two other parks what *can* you do with them in such a place?

And then, like Porphyria's lover, that harassed Hindu correspondent found 'a thing to do'.

"I will take you," he said, "to a place, and I will not tell you what it is, but you shall guess!"

He had by then driven us twice round the Botanical Gardens and this idea had evidently come to him as an inspiration.

He drove us out of the town, through a kind of suburban no-man's land, where roads were being made and houses built, and then on rising ground we saw what was very obviously a hospital or institution of some kind. As we came closer we saw engraved in large letters above the main entrance, MENTAL HOSPITAL.

He did not invite us to 'guess'; he made no comment at all, but turned the car in at the drive and drove up to the main entrance. We left the car and passed in under an arch, at the other side of which there was a compound, with buildings all round, the verandahs giving a cloistral effect. There was a square of burnt-up grass, and a few flower-beds with hot-looking flowers, but no sign of life anywhere. In an office at the left of the arch the superintendent greeted us as though he had been expecting us.

He was European-style, self-assured, and Harvard-educated. He opened the conversation with the announcement that he had read my *Confessions and Impressions*. I made the weary little speech I had been making all over India to the effect that that flamboyantly youthful book had been written in 1929 and it was now 1949. I added that one of the few advantages of middle-age was mental maturity, with a more balanced sense of values as a result. This, I suggested was surely to the good. He replied that maturity was 'not interesting'. I could only murmur that I was sorry.

He then launched into a denunciation of Freudian psychology, completely disregarding such few observations as I was able to edge in on the monologue, and, still talking, took us out to the entrance arch and showed us a large board on which the different kinds of insanity—melancholia, split-personality, etc.—were classified, with their symptoms, persecution-mania, delusion of grandeur, 'voices', and so forth. (He was startled into drawing breath for a moment when I pointed out a spelling error.) It was all extremely elementary, and it was difficult to see what purpose it served, or for whom it was intended. Presumably the medical and nursing-staff knew it all, and the patients would gain nothing by reading it and attempting to apply it to themselves in a morbid self-diagnosis. And how many of the ordinary Indian people who came to the hospital to visit their friends or relatives who were patients there would read it—or understand it if they did?

No attempt was made to show us the hospital; nothing was said about treatment or results. The only mention of patients was the generalisation that men were more subject to mental illness than were women, because, it was asserted, most mental breakdowns were caused by worry, and men had more worries than women had. Mental breakdowns were very common among business-men, for example. Women were more 'balanced'. Amid such a welter of dogmatic assertion it did not seem worth while raising the point about uterine functions in relation to hysteria—that the word hysteria is from the Greek, *husteros*, meaning womb. . . .

In all this our correspondent stood impassively by silent, unsmiling, contributing nothing, as though the whole thing had nothing to do with him.

After which singularly unedifying visit we were driven back to our hotel. The heat was oppressive. We walked about in it trying to come to grips with the place, but it eluded us. It seemed to have no centre, to sprawl shapelessly, like Nagpur, and our thoughts kept going back to Madras of the tall palms and the brilliant blue sea and the blessed cooling breeze.

The flowering trees in the burnt-up gardens were beautiful, as the white sahib had said—trees of purple flowers like bunches of freesia and looking at a distance like lilac, trees like sumach with bunches of white flowers at the ends of thick, leafless fleshy branches, but for the most part the colours of the flowers were too hot. The colours everywhere were altogether too hot with that over-head furnace of sun—the red government buildings (but they are to be made brown under the new regime), the red earth, the brown grass, the red and orange blossoms, the purple blossoms, the wine and purple bougainvillea, paper-dry, the reds and greens and blues and yellows and puces of the women's *saris*.

In the afternoon there was a thunderstorm, and, most wonderful, rain! There was a hot dry smell on the heavy air, and the smell of rain on the hot baked earth. The newspaper correspondent telephoned us to say he was held up by the rain, which in the old city, was very heavy. He came eventually and at my suggestion drove us through the old city, where the rain was turning the gutters into small torrents. People huddled in doorways in their flimsy clothes, and looked out with brown impassive faces. Many of the men held up their *dhotis* like skirts as they paddled along. As the *dhoti* is usually worn drawn up between the legs

Taming a wild elephant at the Elephant Lines, Mysore
Scrubbing a shikar *elephant in the United Provinces jungles*

it was like holding up the leg of a trouser, and to European eyes looked distinctly odd.

But so does the habit of Indian men of walking hand in hand, or with their arms round each other's waists, a custom to be observed throughout India and among all classes—students, railway-officials standing hand in hand or with arms round each other on railway platforms, all kinds and conditions of Indian males.

'Why must they *cuddle* each other?' we would demand of each other, crossly, at times, but upon reflection it is no more effeminate than the Frenchmen's habit of kissing each other. You do not see in India men and women walking hand in hand, or even arm in arm; for that matter you very seldom see men and women walking together at all. The company along the sea-wall round the Gateway of India in Bombay is almost entirely male, and similarly on the long promenade of Madras. We asked our Madras host why there were no women enjoying the cool of evening, and he replied, vaguely, that doubtless they were busy in their kitchens . . . he did not add preparing the meals which they would not eat with their husbands, since in orthodox families the menfolk always eat first and apart.

In Bangalore as in Madras—and in Mysore—we saw the *kolam* outside the houses; this is a pattern drawn in flour or cereal before the step of the porch; it is to feed the ants and birds and bring luck to the house. At a house at which a wedding feast is being held the *kolam* is drawn very large. It is a custom peculiar to South India. It is drawn afresh every morning.

The old city of Bangalore proved to be what by then we had come to think of us 'the usual thing'. There were the usual bazaar streets with open shops displaying brass and copper cooking and water vessels, flower shops with strings of flowers like necklaces, bangle shops stocked with bangles of all sizes and colours in gold and silver and glass; food shops, and tailor-shops where white-clad figures squatted on the floor and turned the handles of sewing-machines; spice shops with conical piles of spices which with their brilliant colourings—red, green, orange—looked like powder-dyes. There were the usual gilded temple domes rising above high walls in narrow alleyways of side streets; the usual tall leaning palms; the usual crowds, mostly male.

But one thing we had not seen elsewhere, and that was a curious kind of hooded cart in place of *tonga* or rickshaw; in it the passengers sit on the floor. These carts were horse-drawn and the horses were in not bad condition. Bullock carts were numerous, the oxen with long horns elaborately painted in red or blue, and tipped with gold.

Slowly through the old town we drove in a deluge of rain that did nothing to cool the hot heavy atmosphere, then once again through the Botanical Gardens with the great stretches of brown grass and the numerous flowering-trees, then our taciturn friend had his second inspiration and drove us out to the cave-temple of Gangadhareswara,

Near Mysore; 'a wilderness of tall palms, alive with monkeys' which is the one thing of interest Bangalore has to offer. This temple of Shiva is on a low boulder-strewn hill, a wild strange wilderness of a place near the Fort. Under a row of sacred pipal trees a number of hooded snakes carved in stone rear up for the encouragement of fertility in the childless.

To our surprise our companion took us with him into the inner recess of the temple, to the very feet of an enormous bull carved out of the solid rock. The mammoth carving—reminiscent of the monoliths of Mahabalipuram—is painted black, its eyes whitened, and its vast neck garlanded with flowers. There was an altar at its base, at which offerings of flowers had been laid. An altar boy brought dishes of ash and red powder and our companion made the trident marks of Shiva on his forehead. The boy then presented each of us with a blossom and was duly rewarded with a coin.

I asked whether this 'tip' went to the upkeep of the temple or if the boy had it for himself. Our friend replied, "Oh, he has it for himself," and he added, unaccountably sardonic, "He got more than he expected!"

We followed a dusty track through great boulders to a smaller cave-temple which houses a huge effigy of the elephant god, Ganesha, similarly cut out of the rock and garlanded. Here the altar-boy in charge rang a bell before giving the ash. Another blossom apiece was presented and another gratuity given, and then we returned to the car . . . and now, having shown us the cave temples, the bazaar, the public gardens, and the mental hospital, our Hindu-in-charge could really feel that he had exhausted the resources of the town, and with, no doubt, a sense of relief at duty-fulfilled drove us back to the hotel . . . where we had the usual vast bedroom, and bathroom-with-commodes, but a rather larger than usual line in cockroaches, which scuttled like small mice in all directions the moment the light was switched on in the bathroom, causing us to sweat a little, irrationally, when they ran over our sandalled feet.

That is all, unless it is of interest that the Bangalore taxi-drivers have a habit of ignoring the meter and fixing their own exorbitant prices. I find that in my diary I record 'a tiresome altercation with the taxi-driver' on the railway station when we went to get the train for Mysore. Perhaps Jean's entry is more vivid for it records the incident as 'a hell of a row'. . . .

This Bangalore interlude is clearly a cautionary tale, the moral of which is never change plans at the last moment without more reason than that an insistent dark gentleman urges you to.

IV

MYSORE

MYSORE may or may not justify the description, 'the Kashmir of the South', probably not, but it is a pleasant city, the capital of the State of Mysore, and the residence of the Maharajah. It is dominated by the Chamundi Hill, about three miles distant, which, at its highest point, crowned by the temple to the goddess Chamundi—one of the manifestations of the consort of Shiva—is over three thousand feet.

According to the guide-book, Mysore is 'The Garden City of India'. We were told this, too, in Benares, by the university young men, who were very insistent we should visit it. There were three things to do in Mysore, they said—visit the Chamundi temple, the Brindavan Gardens at Krishnarajsagar, famous for their fountains—a kind of Indian Versailles, we gathered—and the Institute of Handcrafts. They might have added a fourth, which we discovered for ourselves—the Elephant Lines—for us, with our nostalgia for the jungle, perhaps the most interesting thing of all.

If we enjoyed Mysore more than anywhere else in India it was because for the first time in the whole trip we were completely free, to walk where we liked, come and go as we pleased, make our own plans. This does not mean that we did not appreciate all that was done for us by Indian and Pakistani hosts and hostesses, or were not deeply grateful for the wonderful and so generously given hospitality we everywhere received, because we did appreciate it, and were always touched by the way in which Indian families would take us into their homes—we, white, foreign, and complete strangers—but for months we had been organised and shepherded, and plagued by journalists once we had left the jungles, so that suddenly to realise that we could do exactly as we pleased was both a relief and an excitement. We did not quite escape the Press in Mysore; one stray newspaper man turned up at the hotel, but after the Press persecution of Lahore, Lucknow, Nagpur, one solitary interviewer to be dealt with hardly counted.

Then, too, there is our contention that unless you walk about in a place you never really savour it, because you never really come to grips with it, and, with no car at our disposal for once, we walked all over Mysore and felt that we 'made contact' with it in a way not permitted us in other places, but outstandingly in Lahore and Lucknow.

Oddly enough at Mysore we ran straight into a Forest Department Conference, but the day that Mr. Chaturvedi lunched with other conservators in the hotel we were away at the top of the Chamundi

Hill, and when in the evening we went out to the Brindavan Gardens though he, with most other Conference people, was staying in the hotel there, he was away on some excursion with his colleagues from which he would not return until two or three in the morning. (He had already narrowly missed us in Madras, and by the time he reached Bombay and inquired for us we had already sailed.) Some things, it is evident, are 'not meant'.

There are plenty of beggars on the main street of Mysore, and when you turn off it into the market-place behind, plenty of flies, but on the whole it is a city singularly free of squalor. The Palace is 19th century Indo-Saracenic, which means florid with domes and ornate arches, but it has an Oriental-fairy-tale impressiveness, and when the main gate is illuminated on State occasions and during the Festival of Dasara it must be most wonderful to see—or, as the guide-book more eloquently puts it, present 'a sight unrivalled for its sublime splendour'. We were urged in Madras to 'Get them to turn on the lights for you at the Palace'; it could perhaps have been effected, but we wished no special privileges; we were well content to walk about in a blessed anonymity. According to the guide-book the Palace 'from the basement to the top . . . is adorned with sculptures of very best quality Indian Art'.

At the Institute of Handcrafts we bought some samples of very best quality Indian Art of another kind, in the shape of little inlaid tables and boxes and trays. "Let us go and buy something really difficult to take home—some *furniture*," we said, a little light-headed in our unaccustomed freedom. I think the feeling at the back of our minds was that though we were travelling with rucksacks we were never allowed to carry them ourselves, so might as well be travelling Indian-style with all manner of bundles and burdens.

When we had really let ourselves go in the Institute of Handcrafts we came out again into the sun feeling a little dazed and got on a bus which we hope would take us to the foot of the Chamundi Hill. It did nothing of the kind, but still it served the purpose of taking us out of the town. In the meantime our 'furniture' was delivered to the hotel and taken away again; the man would not leave it because of the need for collecting *baksheesh* ("For the jacket of your book," said Jean, "we might have a design with two kinds of palms—the kind that grows, and the ever-open one. . . .")

It is one of the inexorable laws of life that when you set out to walk to a mountain or a hill with the object of ascending it, it is always farther off than you think. And by the time we started walking to the Chamundi Hill the day was already very hot.

When we inquired of a man at a clinic in what seemed to be a suburb of Mysore, the best way to approach the hill, he exclaimed, "But this is something you should do at five o'clock in the morning, not now! From the top you may have much enjoyment, but now is not the time of day!"

Nevertheless, we said, in our dogged English fashion, it was now or never. Whereupon he directed us through a banana grove, and again promised us 'much enjoyment' from the top of the hill.

The banana grove was cool and green. We attracted a certain amount of interest as we passed through, and a group of young men followed us out to the other side. When we started out across a desert-like *maidan*, however, they remained at the edge of the banana plantation. Across the *maidan* we came to a desolate wilderness of a place with tall palm-trees and alive with monkeys. They also stood and stared at us, and ran and fetched each other to stare, like children, but when we tried to move closer to them they scattered and fled, scrambling up the palms and chattering angrily. Then they sat and stared down at us from the tops of the palms, always rushing off higher, or leaping across to a neighbouring palm, if we moved a step nearer. There was nothing but the palms and the monkeys and the burning sand under our feet and the ferocious sun on the tops of our bare heads. And though we kept on walking the hill never seemed any nearer.

We left the palms and monkeys and came to another open space, where were the ruins of shrines and temples, a shadeless and desolate place, and the more we studied the hill the less we could determine the best point at which to approach it. Then from nowhere in all that burning wasteland an old man in white *dhoti* and turban, and with a white beard, appeared, like a genie. He came towards us obliquely across the brown desert of the *maidan*; it was as though he had come up out of the earth; he came towards us waving an arm, and when he reached us, where we stood waiting for him, he explained to us, in a language of which we did not understand one word, the best way to tackle the hill. He waved and pointed and nodded, and we nodded back, comprehendingly, and *Shukria*, *shukria*, we said, and *Salaam*, and continued on our way in accordance with his instructions, and with the reflection that there is really nothing to this business of understanding foreign languages, given mutual goodwill. . . .

In this cheerful fashion—despite the fact that our thin clothing had already reached the wet-bathing-suit stage—we came at last to the foot of the Thousand Steps. Now we could really get started. Now all we had to do was to climb them. That was all. No doubt after the first five or six hundred we would barely notice it.

You will not visualise a nice neat flight of steps going straight up like a Jacob's Ladder. These steps are rough slabs of granite hacked out of the hillside three hundred years ago; some of them are so wide that several footsteps are needed to traverse them; some are little more than ledges; some are quite shallow; some a foot or so high; they wind round the hill in a rough pilgrim's way, sometimes forming zig-zags. They were so slippery that we decided to climb them barefoot, but coming down a few hours later they were by then so hot it was impossible to do so.

There is a shrine at the bottom of the steps at which the devout pilgrim burns incense, at the outset and at the conclusion of the pilgrimage. Several women whom we met coming down on our way up stopped us and collected in aid of themselves; one old woman attempted to kiss our feet in gratitude when we gave her a handful of small coins. A party of women stopped and chattered at us shrilly, but did not demand *baksheesh*.

Half-way up there is a huge black sacred bull carved out of a single boulder. This Nandi is three hundred years old, twenty-five feet long and sixteen feet high. He is decorated with ropes and bells and flowers all carved in stone. He is sitting down, like the great bull in the cave temple at Bangalore, but not so frightening; he is black and colossal, but of most benign expression.

A man squatted near the Nandi performing his anal ablutions from water poured into his left hand by a woman standing at his side and holding a brass water-vessel. Neither were in the least disconcerted by our appearance, and the toilet continued.

The heat was fierce when we started, and it became fiercer as we climbed. It seemed to be intensified by the number of scarlet-blossomed trees growing in the rough bouldery cactus-covered wilderness at either side of the steps. Below, a tremendous red plain spread out, broken by palms and the unexpected greenness of an oasis of trees, out of which rose the white domes and towers of the city. The lake of the great dam out at Krishnarajsagar shimmered like a mirage in the distance. There were the minarets of a mosque, and red earth, red blossoms, red rocks, the hot density of the whole stage-set of a landscape emphasised by the burning blue back-cloth of the sky. It was brilliant, dramatic, and somehow preposterous. All the violent heat and colour of South India was in it.

At the summit of the hill, near the temple, a little girl squatted on the ground opposite a hut selling coconuts and bananas and incense for *puja*. We bought a coconut apiece, to quench the raging thirsts we had by then developed, bananas to allay our hunger, and incense because the little girl was very insistent about it—"*Puja*," she insisted, her small brown fingers persistently thrusting the little cones into my hand, "You take this for *puja*!" I found myself recalling the Catholic places of pilgrimage with candles, rosary beads, and crucifixes being sold in the vicinity, just as in climbing the Thousand Steps I had found myself recalling the Stations of the Cross on the way up to the chapel at the top of the hill above Eichstätt in Bavaria, and the Stations of the Cross at each side of the steps which climb up to the Capuchin monastery at Salzburg. There are shrines at either side of the Thousand Steps, one to the Hindu 'holy family', Shiva and Parvati (one of the numerous manifestations of the wife of Shiva) and their son, the elephant god, Ganesha, another to Ganehsa himself, one to the goddess Chamundi, another to Shiva alone.

Chamundi itself is a pleasant and clean little village of whitewashed houses with tiled roofs and dark interiors built round the temple, which is in the same style as the Kapâleeswarer temple at Madras, with the very high four-sided tapering tower covered with coloured enamelled figures from the Hindu Pantheon, and the hooded serpent canopy of the Seventh Heaven at the top, but not so beautiful. The usual *dhoti*-clad figure emerged at sight of us and offered us a flower and tried to attach itself to us as a guide, but by then we knew better than to accept these floral tributes.

(On the way down the Thousand Steps a boy ran out from a hut by the great Nandi and tried to thrust a blossom apiece upon us, crying to us that we give him eight annas 'to drink coffee'.)

At the other side of the hill from the temple there is the Rajendra Vilas Palace, in the best sugar-icing, ornament-on-a-wedding-cake style of Indian architecture, and on the way to it, at a cross-roads, a huge and most alarming looking demon fashioned in cement, and painted. He is depicted wearing a *dhoti*, cuirass, and cloak, and in one hand he brandishes a scimitar over his head, and in the other clutches a hooded serpent. He has ferocious looking moustaches and bulging staring eyes and is enough to frighten anyone who believes in demons out of their wits.

Hot as it had been on the hill-top it was much hotter down below on the red plain. And if it is always-further-than-you-think to reach the base of a high hill you intend to climb, it is also much farther than you think to walk back into a city by that short cut which from the hill top looks so simple and obvious, and which, when you get down below, among the palms and the monkeys and the ruined temples and the burning sand, is nothing of the kind. The monkeys peered and jeered; a boy offered to sell us a bunch of bananas; the April, mid-afternoon, South-Indian sun burned down on the crowns of our bare heads.

As we trudged along through the dust Jean suddenly inquired, morosely, "How long does it take symptoms of sunstroke to manifest themselves?"

I answered harshly, angrily, for what else can you do when someone expresses your own unacknowledged anxiety?

But not merely did we not get sunstroke, but were sufficiently recovered after throwing cold water over ourselves, and changing our clothes and drinking large iced lemon-squashes, to come to an agreement with a young Indian delegate to the Conference to share a car with him and visit Brindavan Gardens that evening.

Krishnarajsagar is twelve miles from Mysore; the drive to it offers scenery pleasant, with low hills, but unremarkable. The gardens are laid out below the huge dam across the River Cauvey. They are terraced, and there are numerous 'tanks' and fountains—the place is, in fact, a water-garden, and the guide-book proudly quotes an anonymous 'Visitor' as declaring that 'not even Versailles can compare with the garden and fountains at Krisnarajsagar'. The tremendous wall of the dam flanks one side of the gardens, and on a hill on the other side there is the great European-style hotel.

The gardens are beautiful, but not more beautiful than many other famous Indian gardens, with the usual long narrow pools bordered with cypresses, but they are unique in the number and variety of fountains everywhere. There are stretches of carefully irrigated lawn, and rose-beds and arbours, and blossoming trees, and grassy banks, and paved walks. At one point a man squats on the grass selling guavas, and slices of papaya, and nuts and bananas. And vivid as the garden's flowers are the *saris* of the women who wander about holding children by the hand and chattering in their high-pitched voices.

With dusk a feeling of expectancy heightens the enjoyment. Suddenly one fountain flushes with rose, turns green, shades to purple, and then everywhere the great plumes and cascades and high-flung showers of water take on colour, and the whole place which a moment ago had been cool and gracious in the evening light is swept into an incredible crude coloured picture-postcard vulgarity, and everyone is manifestly delighted. The place was as packed with people as Hampton Court or Versailles on a public holiday.

When we had had enough of the Blackpool-en-fête atmosphere we went up to the hotel, where our Indian friend with whom we had come sat on the terrace with other Conference people, including a New Zealander, and we had drinks—everything was available, gin, whisky, beer—and with the New Zealander we talked mountains and climbing, and jungles and tigers, and of the dynamic personality of our mutal absent friend Mr. Chaturvedi. . . .

Mysore afforded us plenty of interest, but the one thing we very badly needed it did not give us, and that was sleep. Our room was one of a long row opening on to a terrace, upon which servants lay on the ground coughing, rauching, shrilly chattering, all night; there was a radio blaring from the Hindu hotel across the road; there were dogs howling like packs of jackals, and at two in the morning some of the Conference people came back from the excursion and sat talking in the room next to us, their window open like ours, their voices high-pitched and non-stop as Indian voices so invariably are. . . . Somewhere around three I put on a dressing-gown and went to the window of the next room and saw through the bars three Hindu-style gentlemen, two sitting at table with a bottle of whisky between them, and the third lying in his *dhoti* on the bed. . . . When I pointed out that they were making sleep for us in the next room impossible they looked abashed, apologised, and thereafter not another sound came from the room. But there was no stopping the coughing servants or the barking dogs. And anyhow two hours later it was light and the whole place astir with the beginning of one more blistering day.

After the usual tea-and-bananas *chota hazri* we went out into the comparative coolness of the hours before nine o'clock to take photographs and look for the Elephant Lines. But we went first to the railway station to find out about trains for Bombay—and discovered, to our dismay, that it was not a night-journey but a two-nights' journey. We decided to spend a night in Bangalore and go by day-train the next day. Thus proving that however much you may hope never to return to a place you can never be sure you have really seen the last of it.

We walked about Mysore thinking again what a handsome city it was, with its showy white buildings, its flowering trees—pink-flowered rain-trees with their cool shade in striking contrast to the hot red and gold of the mohair trees—and its beautiful white oxen with their long painted horns. Sometimes the horns would be completely encased in gold or silver; sometimes one would be painted blue and the other red or green; one we saw with blue painted horns to match the blue-painted axles and spokes of the large-wheeled cart. We walked about Mysore taking pictures of white domes through intricately carved arches. We walked about Mysore looking for the Elephant Lines, without the slightest idea where they were.

We inquired of the soldiers on guard at the Maharajah's Palace but some of them had no English, and one who had did not know where the Elephant Lines were. We headed out of the town because it seemed more likely they would be outside the town than in the centre of it. We asked a European-style gentleman and he did not know, but we were overheard asking him by a Hindu-style gentleman who had good English and who took charge of us. He took us down a cul-de-sac of small and poor houses, and at the end of this street there was a wooden gate with barbed wire at the top.

"Elephant Lines," said our friend, with a wave of the hand.

He left us and we continued on to the wooden gate. Looking over it we saw a huge compound, with tall trees which gave a dark shade, and under the trees sure enough elephants were tied. We followed the wall round into a side street, where the compound was flanked by a high wall. Presently in the wall there was an archway and a man on guard. We asked if we might come in, and he shook his head, meaning Yes, in the Indian way, so we marched into the compound, like people who know what they are about, which is the only way to go anywhere, but most necessary when one doesn't really quite know what next. . . .

About every three years Mysore State stages what is called a *keddah*, for the capture of wild elephants for the service of the Maharajah and for use in the forest depots. There are two kinds of *keddah* operation. One method is for beaters, mounted on tame elephants, to drive the herd into a stockade, the other is the method of hunting the wild elephants through the forest, the hunters mounted on tame elephants and armed with coils of rope; the elephants are captured with a noose round the neck. This is considered the more sporting method, as more risk is involved.

When the captured elephants, their necks bleeding from their efforts to escape the noose, are brought to the training enclosures they are secured by the neck and one forefoot and one hind-foot to trees beyond their strength to break, or to iron stakes driven too deeply into the ground for even a desperate elephant's straining to uproot. And they strain night and day without ceasing, till the ropes cut into their flesh and the blood runs.

It is a pitiful sight to watch the great beasts in their endless futile straining, their eyes wild with terror. Yet perhaps the most pitiful sight of all in the Elephant Lines at Mysore was a little elephant of six months old. The little creature kept lifting its free front foot and trying to rub off the rope on its tied foot, from which the blood was running, and it had a look of sheer terror in its eyes, the wild look of panic.

We inquired of a man who wore a sports' coat and a *dhoti*, and who appeared to be on the staff if it was right that the ropes should cut into the hide of the elephants like this. He replied, "It seems cruel, I know, but only so can we bring them to hand." He added that the chafings which looked, he admitted, 'so horrible' were in fact only grazes, not deep wounds; they would soon heal. The fact remains, as Sir Eardley Wilmot points out in his admirable *Life of an Elephant*, that scars are always left on an elephant which had been born and bred in the forests and then captured and trained to the service of man. He calls these scars, left from the ropes cutting into the flesh, 'the brand of slavery'.

I asked how long the elephants must suffer like this, and was told 'a month only'. After that month of unremitting torment and terror, it seems, their spirits are broken, and they can be trained for work. Their characteristic patience, which stands them in such good stead in the jungle, becomes the patience of despair. They learn to kneel at the command of a pigmy of a human being, and show no resentment at a crack on the skull with an iron spike like a boat-hook. We noticed the scars on the legs of the elephants sufficiently broken in to be allowed to stand unshackled.

We were shown the Maharajah's private elephants, huge beasts with their tusks sawn off half-way. On the last day of the ten-day feast of Dasara, in September-October, His Highness rides through the streets seated in a golden *howdah* on a State elephant so elaborately decorated, so covered with trappings, that the beast itself is hardly visible. In this way His Highness proceeds to a torchlight review of his troops on the outskirts of the town.

We saw also, in long stalls on the Elephant Lines, the Maharajah's pure white cattle. To see his Sacred Horse, which is never ridden, it is necessary to visit the royal stables at the Palace, where also may be seen some of the wonderful cream stallions from the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.

The elephants stand, tied to their trees or stakes, at either side of a kind of road across the compound. One line of elephants has behind it a lush green plantation of plantains and palms, which the other line faces. There is a jungle darkness and greenness under the tall trees, and the warm grey smell of the great beasts, and splashes of sunlight, and the gleam of white *dhotis* and brown bodies. There is a post-impressionist picture in it at a glance, but aesthetic pleasure in the scene is spoilt by the fact that it is impossible not to be aware of that endless straining, of the ropes cutting into the flesh, and the panic in the eyes of wild creatures inescapably trapped.

We felt, when we left the Elephant Lines, that it was the final fall of the curtain on the jungle scene, and we left feeling deeply sad. Our knowledge of the primeval splendour of the jungles added to our pity for these captive wild creatures. That any creature which had ever known the freedom of the jungles, and the fierce instinctiveness of that life, should ever be submitted to a process deliberately calculated to destroy all that is most vital in the natural animal make-up, is a wrong too great to be told. It is a sin-against-life, like castration and sterilisation.

There is what is reputed to be a fine zoo in Mysore. Nothing would have induced us to visit it. The sight of a robin in a cage may put all heaven in a rage; but what does heaven feel about a tiger in a cage? Or for that matter any wild creature, its spirit broken, degraded to the antics demanded of it in a circus?

Part VII

BANGALORE TO BOMBAY

I

TO THE WESTERN GHATS

ALL the long burning afternoon the train dragged across the red plain, strewn with boulders, arid with cactus and palms, flowing away like a red sea to lave the feet of stony mountains two-dimensional against the blue density of the sky. There would be an occasional oasis of green trees, the occasional brilliant emerald of a paddy-field—ah, the bright cool beautiful rice standing with its feet in water throughout the long hot day, why wouldn't it be greener than green grass? Green grass! Was there grass once, I have forgotten it. . . .

Herds of black goats nose about in the red dust. Indian goats are probably like Indian cows and will eat anything. The whole landscape is completely shadeless; the heat pours out of the sky and beats up from the earth, and even the banked white clouds over the mountains seem to give out heat.

The compartment is full—naturally. There is a bench down each side, and one down the middle. On the middle bench people sit back to back, divided by a wooden bar. There are iron bars across the windows. If you care to you can let down a wire-mesh window to keep out some of the dust; or you can let down a shutter to keep out the sun; or you can let down both . . . then you have nothing to stare at but the brown faces which, when they are not alive with shrill excited conversation, assume an Oriental impassivity.

I have forgotten now on which of the many hot dusty endless train journeys it was that the whole compartment was thrown into a state of gloom by the sight of a dead man carried on the usual flimsy funeral stretcher on to the platform. One woman sat for a long time with her eyes shaded with her hand; she pushed aside the game of snakes-and-ladders—or something of the kind—she had been playing with the child who accompanied her; an old woman next her drew the end of her *sari* across her face and rocked herself to and fro. It was as though the corpse had been brought into the compartment. At the next station, a couple of hours later, a little bride got in, covered with jewellery from head to foot, a gold ring as big as a saucer in her nose, her mother in attendance as etiquette demands, and a bridal paraphernalia of gold and silver vessels among her baggage. The dead man at the last station was immediately forgotten; the women came out of their huddles and became alight and alive again, and before long the little bride had so far recovered from bridal bashfulness as to let her *sari* slip back and unveil her face and allow herself to be drawn into playing the dice-game with the child. She was anyhow nothing but a child herself. The transition from grief to joy, from depression to eager interest, on the part of all, was child-like in its abruptness.

But on that journey from Mysore back to Bangalore we had neither corpses nor brides, and there was nothing to do but sit and stare and swelter and wait for the tedium to end.

The second phase of the journey was the eighty-mile run from Bangalore to Gutakall. This takes nine and a half hours. We left at ten minutes past eight in the morning and arrived at half-past five in the afternoon. This feat of slow motion is achieved by long waits at innumerable small stations.[1] The landscape was semi-desert, with distant blue hills. It was a wild, savage sort of landscape, curiously Biblical, with stony hills in the foreground such as Moses might have ascended to have that chat with God which resulted in the Ten Commandments. There were palms and cacti and boulders and red dust, as on the first stage of the journey, but the hills brought a new quality to the scene. Now there was not only the occasional oasis of green trees in the hot red wilderness, but the startling greenness of trees scattered singly. And always the brilliant emerald squares of the paddy-fields, and where they had been inundated flamingoes standing in the water, like white flowers on pink stalks.

There were numerous monkeys on the stations—and numerous beggars, the mutilated and the blind predominating, as always.

By nine o'clock the day was already hot. By mid-day, with the sun immediately overhead, the whole landscape was almost completely shadeless. Sometimes on a station there would be a little shade from the cool-looking rain-trees with their fluffy pink flowers.

The people seemed to be darker skinned than we had seen anywhere, and even the poorest of the women would be smothered in jewellery, ornate necklaces, rows of bangles round ankles and forearms, large heavy ear-rings; and always the jasmine flowers in the knot of their deep black hair.

The persistent smell of jasmine flowers, strong and sweet, almost overpowering, and the smell of coffee—that is the smell of South India.

The coach filled up; people squeezed in and sat on their bundles; it was impossible to reach the toilet, and yet people did reach it. In an Indian train all things are possible. On the stations *pani-wallahs* came round with buckets of water, for which no charge is made. You thrust your drinking vessel through the bars of the window, your pale arm outstretched among all the brown arms, and the water when you get it is warm and does nothing to quench your raging thirst.

To our relief and surprise we got not merely places on the Bombay train but room to spread our bedding. It was our last train journey in India, but long hot crowded dusty train-journeys had become so much a habit with us in the last months that it was difficult to realise it. But how differently we returned to Bombay from how we left it! Then we had allowed ourselves to be persuaded that first-class was 'the only possible way to travel in India'. And we had thought horrible what later we should have considered an extremely comfortable journey, almost, by Indian standards, de luxe. We had left Bombay clean and tidy; we arrived back in it neither . . . but neither did we care. We both could say, 'Much have I seen and known, cities of men and manners. . . .' and that was what mattered.

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[1] The time taken for this distance is perhaps not so remarkable as it may at first appear, in view of the fact that the average speeds of Indian trains are— for distances of 500 miles and more, 30 miles per hour for Mail trains, 25 for Express, and 15 for Passenger. These are the fast long-distance trains. . . .

We got out and walked about the platform at Poona, for the childish pleasure of being able to say afterwards, "When I was at Poona." But Poona from the train window looked nothing much as hill-stations go, though no doubt if you come to it when the monsoon is in full swing in Bombay it seems an earthly paradise.

But after Poona the railway line climbs and runs along a ridge of the Western Ghats, the great mountain range of Western India. (The Eastern Ghats run parallel with the Madras coast. The two ranges meet at an angle by Cape Comorin, the most southerly point of India.) We had not seen scenery like this since we climbed in the little mountain train up to Darjeeling. At Mahabaleshwar, to which the government moves from Bombay in the hot weather (the Indians emulating the British in this matter, leaving the masses they govern to swelter in the plain) the mountains rise to over four thousand feet. It was a great joy, after so much burning red and brown plain, to see deep valleys and green grass again. We had not expected mountains at this point, and it was a reminder that India could be beautiful as well as arid—a fact easily overlooked after weeks of journeying in the plains, away from the jungles and the Himalaya.

Back in Bombay they told us at the shipping-office that we should need to be vaccinated before sailing. We walked away in the heat debating the question. As we saw it there were several very good reasons for not being done—the first being that we were not sure that we believed in it; another was that it was far too hot to be made to feel ill; another that we did not feel like it; and another that I, anyhow, had quite enough to cope with in the shape of an infected instep which I had developed on the last lap of the journey as the result of a rub from the hard leather of an Indian sandal. One way and another it looked as though we would not get done. The place at which we had to get done was somewhere in the middle of the city. We took a bus out to Malabar Hill instead and sat under the blossoming trees of the hanging gardens, telling ourselves that it was far too hot to do anything else.

At intervals, next day, we speculated on how long un-vaccinated persons were held in quarantine when there was an outbreak of smallpox on board ship.

"There's still time to get done——"

"It's too hot!"

"And my foot hurts."

"It's probably all nonsense, anyhow!"

In the early morning a face near my pillow said, speaking as it were in italics, "*She's there!*"

I opened sleep-heavy eyes and blinked into the face and inquired, drowsily, "*Who's* there?"

"*She* is!"

There seemed to be a combination of fear and triumph in the voice.

The face withdrew, and I lay staring for a little, as one does lost in the no-man's-land between sleep and waking. The face had become the back of a head—attached to a figure which stood in its nightgown out on the verandah, beyond which there were tall palms and a glimmer of blue sea.

Realisation began seeping in like light through a crack in the drawn blinds of sleep. I sat up. The figure on the verandah turned.

"You can see her quite plainly," it said. "Come and look!"

I tottered out of bed and across the great open spaces of the huge room and out on to the verandah.

"You can see her funnels!"

Yes, you could see her funnels all right, between the palms. She had come in in the night and she waited there, the great liner from Australia; waiting to take us home, back to that place we had so often so intensely longed for—England's green and pleasant land. It would be spring there now, with white and mauve lilac, soft and cool, and pale pink apple-blossom than which there is no blossom in the world sweeter—why, then, this sudden dismay at the sight of those funnels looming up between the palms of humid, beggar-ridden Bombay?

II

FAREWELL TO INDIA

GETTING into India is a great deal easier than getting out of it. Getting out entails queueing for your 'medical inspection', queueing for your Customs declaration—at which you fill in a form used for war-time censorship purposes, and the half of which is automatically crossed out—queueing for your baggage inspection, queueing for currency declaration and exchange. Queueing for over an hour in any temperature is exhausting, but doing it in the humidity of Bombay when you feel before you start as though you have got out of a hot bath and put your clothes on without first drying yourself, is something which has to be experienced to be realised. There were wet patches on the backs of the men's shirts and the women's dresses. Anyone remarking that it was hot would probably have been lynched.

When we at last got into the medical-inspection room a severe looking Indian lady doctor demanded our vaccination papers. There was the bad moment in which I confessed that we had none, and in which we waited for her to snap that in that case she was afraid we could not go aboard. Instead of which she asked if we would object to being inoculated on board, 'if necessary'. I replied that I did not think so. . . . I hadn't really thought that one out.

To this she retorted, "It's not a case of what you think! This is positive!"

That, I thought, was badly put, but I hastened to amend my answer to the required 'positive', and assure her that I would not object. We were then duly stamped and passed out. That was the 'medical inspection'.

When we finally stood on deck watching the Gateway of India receding into the general brown mass of Bombay we asked ourselves again, why this curious pang of parting from this vast land, this sub-continent, in which we had so often been exasperated and homesick? Why this nostalgia for the dust and heat and flies, the fantastic thermo-pylisms, the incredible poverty, squalor, and superstition?

The answer is because though India is all that, she is also something more. Much more. She is the Himalaya, and the primeval forests; she is the proud courage of the Pathans, and the humble courage of the Gonds; she is palms that lean against the sunset, and the smell of jasmine and tuber-roses, boys with eyes like gazelles, and peasant women who carry themselves like queens; she is the Golden Temple of the Sikhs, and the white dream of the Taj Mahal. All this and more. She is impassiveness and resignation and the continual reaffirmation of belief in eternity. She is Mahabalipuram and the temples under the sea. She is the ever-present possibility of the moment of truth, of meeting the tiger face to face. . . .

We said, leaning on the ship's rail and watching the dimming brown mass that is the seething city of Bombay, When we get home people will ask us 'What did you think of India?' and it as though they should say 'When did you last stop beating your wife?'

And they will ask the question in another context, in the political context, meaning, 'How do you think they will make out now that the British have quit?'

The answer to which can only be: 'I've no idea! It's not my concern, or yours. It's a purely Indian concern. The important thing is that they've got their independence at long last and can now shape their own destiny. Whatever way they shape it the masses will hardly be worse off than under the British Raj. British imperialism has bequeathed the whole sub-continent tremendous problems of illiteracy and poverty. The New India has to start from scratch, The leaders are well aware of the problems, and we can only wish them well. There are anti-democratic tendencies in this India-in-transition it is reasonable to regard with misgiving—but who are we to moralise, still less to judge?

Our own democracy was never for export to our subject peoples —and still is not. And when the loudest-mouthed democracy in the world is given to political witch-hunts even among its film-stars it ill becomes the West to criticise the East. They will deal with their own problems in their own way—and pay for their mistakes in their own time; like the West. But there the likeness ends, for as Tagore pointed out years ago, whereas Europe is one country made into many, India is many countries packed into one geographical receptacle; her problems therefore are diverse and complex, and aggravated by caste regulations.[1] We have never understood the East, and probably never shall, but it is a sign of grace to admit the fact.

"But Pakistan, what about Pakistan?"

Partition is always a tragedy, but though we are as directly responsible for it in India as in Palestine and Ireland, it is not, ironically, our problem. What the sub-continent will make of it, along with the many other problems we have bequeathed it, remains to be seen.

We are anxious, said an earnest young man in Madras, that you shall not misrepresent India. I assured him I had his country's welfare no less at heart than he had. There are two countries continually misrepresented—India and Ireland. A great deal of sheer nonsense is written about both countries from sheer lack of historical and political

[1] Under the new constitution Republican India has officially abolished caste, which, as Douglas Brown, *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, has observed (Jan. 21, 1950) is in some respects as futile 'as abolishing snobbery in Britain by Act of Parliament', but nevertheless, as he says, 'clearly it points the way for the social reformers of the future.' It is a beginning, but will take time, like the Moslem abolition of *purdah*.

knowledge. I did not go to India to make a sociological or political survey and give a 'verdict'. In a first visit of a few months, some weeks of which were spent in the jungles, I would not so presume. The new India is in any case still wet from birth. It has to be given time to grow. Even then it will not be our affair.

Chiefly I went to India, as I began this book by saying, because imagination was stirred by a single word—*jungle*. I went to renew and extend acquaintance with the East—and a big part of the extension was the satisfaction of setting foot in primeval forests. I went, if you like, under the impetus of that 'fascination of danger' which Anatole France has declared to be at the bottom of all great passions—on the principle that 'it is the mingling of terror with delight that intoxicates'. I have walked in the jungle, as I have told, and been afraid; and stalked the tiger from the comparative safety of the back of a trained *shikar* elephant and still been afraid, to the extent of vowing 'never more'.

But being afraid is never a reason for not doing a thing. On the contrary it is a good reason for doing it. We have it within ourselves to redeem all our moments of cowardice. If I say now that one day I should like to go again to the jungles and meet the tiger on foot it sounds like self-deception or boasting, a vain-glorious, self-deluding fantasy indulged in an armchair safety, yet I assert it knowing very well, beyond all possibility of self-deception, that once again on the path of the tiger, confronted with fresh pug-marks, fresh droppings, the adrenaline discharge in my blood would make me sick with fear; I should start at every crackle of the dry grass, almost run if there should suddenly come the warning cry of the samba—yet we did hear that cry once when we were on foot, and there were pug-marks, and we did not run—and probably collapse in my tracks if the tiger appeared. But then, also, I might not, and if I did survive the ordeal—and many have, and accounted it very little—I should have proved something to myself. As it were vindicated myself. All that is purely personal, I know, but then meeting the tiger face to face is a very personal business. It is, you might say, very strictly an affair between you and the tiger.

That counsel we received in reply to our 'What-should-we-do-if—" that sound, sensible counsel, "Stand quite still—and try to get a photograph!" has still to be put to use; the occasion has still to be sought, because the photograph has still to be taken; the photograph of the *living* tiger . . . in his jungle.

In the hot English summer in which this book was written, sometimes in the evenings a water-bird would fly over from a near-by lake, trailing its mournful cry through the warm stillness, a lost cry, infinitely sad. Just such a bird cries in just such a manner along the dried-up river-beds of the jungles of the Kumaon hills at sundown, when the elephant moves like a shadow in the brief twilight, and you listen, and the whole jungle listens—the excitable monkeys and peacocks, the nervous little chital, the always tense samba—for the call of the tiger

—that deep, melancholy, up-from-the-belly, *Ah-humm-mm! Ah-humm-mm! I, the tiger, I come! I come!* And you lean out from the *katolah* and see fresh pug-marks in the sand, crossing your elephant tracks of the previous evening. . . .

I forgot to tell about that, and what it does, chemically, to the blood. But it's too late now. This is the end of the book. The end of the jungle journey. For the time being.

For the time being. . . .

THE END

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